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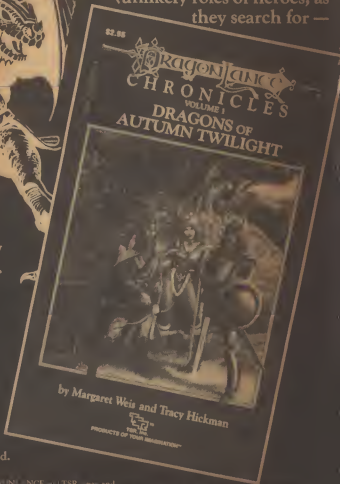
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# AMAZING®

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES  
May 1985

## DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Robert Silverberg: Opinion
- 8 Robert Coulson & Frank Catalano: Book Reviews
- 20 The Readers: Discussions
- 120 Balrd Searles: Screen Reviews
- 162 George H. Scithers & Darrell Schweltzer: The Observatory

## FICTION

- 26 Joel Henry Sherman: Offerings at Medusa
- 38 J. P. Boyd: The Werebear and the Rainbow
- 52 Charles L. Harness: O Lyric Love
- 79 Grendel Briarton: Through Time & Space with Ferdinand Feghoot ♂
- 80 James Haralson: A Night on the Interchange
- 99 Frederick Turner: The Expedition
- 102 Kelth Roberts: Kitecadet
- 124 Avram Davidson: Duke Pasquale's Ring

## FACT

- 66 Stephen L. Gillett, Ph.D.: The Cambrian Explosion

COVER: Kelth Parkinson for "Offerings at Medusa"

POETRY: John Devin, pp37 & 119

CARTOON, CARTOON: William Rotsler & Alexis Gilliland, p19

# Opinion

by Robert Silverberg

Nearly a hundred years ago, H.G. Wells — the first and, I think, the greatest of modern science-fiction authors — wrote a powerful short novel called *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, in which a brilliant scientist surgically reshapes apes, cattle, pigs, and other animals into humanoid creatures. Though Wells can hardly be accused of being hostile to science in general — he held a heartily optimistic view of the benefits that technology could bring — his primary aim in *Moreau* was to write a terrifying tale of horror, and in that he succeeded splendidly. His Dr. Moreau is the maddest of mad scientists, and the beast-people — though some are sympathetically depicted — are bestial indeed, reverting quickly to the feral state once their creator has been slain: “As I approached the monster lifted its glaring eyes to mine, its lips went trembling back from its red-stained teeth, and it growled menacingly. . . .”

Wells surely intended his readers to react with shock and dismay to his account of the achievements of Dr. Moreau, but later science-fiction writers have approached the theme of metamorphosis more positively. James Blish, in his impressively inventive novel *The Seedling Stars* (1957), told of the human race undergoing extensive adaptation so that it would be capable of colonizing alien worlds. Blish wrote of “the application to the germ cells of an elaborate constellation of techniques — selective mitotic poisoning, pinpoint X-irradiation,

tectogenetic microsurgery, competitive metabolic inhibition, and perhaps fifty more . . . which collectively had been christened ‘pantropy.’ The word, freely retranslated, meant ‘changing everything’ — and it fitted.” A few years later, Cordwainer Smith brilliantly portrayed the lives of genetically transformed humanoid dogs and bulls and cats in such dazzling stories as “The Ballad of Lost C’Mell” and “The Dead Lady of Clown Town.” And in the work of such recent writers as John Varley and Greg Bear, the notion of genetic modification of all sorts of creatures, human and otherwise, is a routine part of story backgrounds. As well it should be, for we find ourselves living at a time when the concept of genetic engineering has moved from science fiction to industry. Dozens of corporations are at work right now finding ways to create new life-forms. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has 26 patent examiners working in the area of biotechnology, 12 of them specializing in genetic engineering; and just now they have a backlog of 2600 patent applications undergoing processing in the area of biotechnology — so busy a schedule that it takes an average of 28 months for an application in the field of genetic engineering to be acted upon.

But we are not likely very soon to find any significant marvels of genetic engineering emerge from these busy laboratories. At a meeting of the Industrial Biotechnology Association, held in San Francisco in the summer

of 1984, speaker after speaker warned that anti-technology activists are already at work arousing fear and trembling in the general populace in the hope of blocking genetic-engineering research through legal action. The same people who created the hysteria that has paralyzed or perhaps destroyed the nuclear-power industry are moving on toward their next triumph over technology.

"It would not surprise me one bit," said Harold Green of George Washington University, counsel to Genex Corporation, "to see some of the anti-nuclear negativists extend their negativism to genetic engineering."

Lawsuits are already being filed under provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, he said, to tie up genetic research in the courts. NEPA, enacted in 1968, requires federal agencies to make a thorough study of environmental issues before approving any action that could significantly affect the environment. "The litigation could be endless and enormous in cost," Green pointed out, drawing a parallel with the legal strife that has kept nuclear power plants out of service for a decade or more after completion, at a cost to power companies and electricity users of billions of dollars.

Opposition to genetic research is founded, apparently, on the fear that the gene labs are staffed with cold-blooded amoral scientists who will, intentionally or through sheer negligence, flood the world with terrifying new organisms. Once the Pandora's box of genetic engineering is allowed to open, it is argued, a host of nightmarish foes will spring forth: plague-bearing microorganisms meant for use in germ warfare, say, which will get loose instead among innocent civilians. Or horrifying science-fictional monsters that will rampage through quiet

suburban streets. Or mutated bacteria which, although intended for beneficial functions, turn out to have some hideous capability, unforeseen and uncontrollable. Worst of all, say the anti-genetic crusaders, *human beings themselves* may one day be modified, in some super-Nazi campaign to create a perfect world. The children of the wealthy may be turned into super-beings, they say; the children of the poor will be altered in the womb to make them sturdy and docile, the better to perform menial tasks. And so forth.

These insecurities have already had some real-world results. The city of Berkeley, California — always in the forefront of social concern — made it illegal, in 1977, for the dreaded genetic research to take place within its city limits. Since the University of California at Berkeley is one of the world's great scientific centers, gene-research corporations wishing to use the university's facilities have found it necessary to set up headquarters in nearby Emeryville, an otherwise insignificant Bay Area town that thus by an accident of politics may become the capital city of genetic engineering. When one of the Emeryville companies produced a modified bacterium that was capable of helping farm crops resist frost, anti-biotechnology activists successfully kept it from being tested at a University of California agricultural facility. No less a judge than John Sirica of Watergate fame issued an injunction keeping the new organism bottled up until all possible environmental consequences of releasing it, even under controlled conditions, had been checked out, a process likely to take some years.

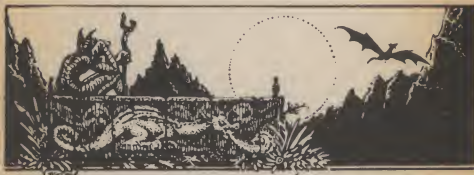
Nobody wants a horde of mutated amoebas getting into our water system and blotting out all life on Earth.

Nobody, I think, wants to see human embryos turned into scientifically-engineered street-sweepers and dish-washers. Some government regulation of the genetic-engineering industry is not only inevitable but desirable, say the gene-splicers themselves.

But what is beginning to happen sounds dishearteningly familiar: the old humanist loathing of technological advancement coming to the fore once more. The Luddites who smashed textile-factory machinery in 1811 for fear that their jobs would be lost, those who thought that vaccination was a dangerous invention of the devil, the dichards who opposed the chlorination

(let alone the fluoridation!) of drinking water, those who just a few years ago argued that the space program was a monstrous waste of effort and that computers are inimical to all human values, all those have their counterparts in the modern-day activists who see a new Hiroshima in every nuclear power plant and a new Dr. Moreau in every genetic-engineering researcher. If they have their way, it will be a long, long time before the pantropically modified space explorers that James Blish envisioned begin their journeys toward the distant worlds of space.

✂



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# Book Reviews

by Robert Coulson

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## **A Separate Star**

by Frank Kelly Freas

Greenswamp Pubs, 4216 Blackwater,  
Virginia Beach VA 23457 \$24.95 (hc),  
\$14.95 (pb)

Kelly's second art book has probably fewer color prints than his first (I didn't count), but it has a better integration of art and text: more description of how each work was produced, and why. A fair number of black-and-white drawings are included, and the color work includes a couple of record jackets as well as book and magazine work. Reproduction, to this non-artist's eye, appears flawless, and of course the art is superb. There is some art in here that I don't like, but none that isn't well done. (I have my firm opinions on style and subject matter, as well as technique.) The book includes a pretty wide variety of both subject matter and style, and I recommend it.

## **Yesterday's Tomorrows**

by Joseph J. Corn and

Brian Horrigan

Summit Books, \$17.95 (trade paperback)

A moderately fascinating look at the way tomorrow used to look, from the beginning of this century until yesterday. The science-fiction pulps and movies are included, but most of the material comes from the slick magazines, the hobby mags — *Popular Mechanics* and its rivals — and various architectural and automotive drawing boards, plus a few World's Fair

exhibits. The House of Tomorrow, the Car of Tomorrow, the Army of Tomorrow, even an ad for Revlon's "Futura-rama" lipstick. An interesting if somewhat overpriced display of what the average citizen thought and was told about the future. And, of course, their future is our present, and comparisons are interesting, particularly so to "future-oriented" individuals. The moral would seem to be that one should not necessarily believe expert prognostications.

## **Enchantment**

by Doris and Boris Vallejo

Ballantine, \$14.95 (trade paperback)

A slightly oversized (9"×12") book, with fifteen stories of erotic fantasy by Doris, each accompanied by one full-color painting and several black-and-white illustrations by Boris. Each story, by itself, is acceptable if not brilliant. They do tend to seem monotonous if one reads several in quick succession. Partly due to their short length, that puts more emphasis on the similarities of sex rather than on the difference of approaches. Also partly due to my low tolerance for the popular psychology of erotica — or of anything else, for that matter. Readers more inured to pop psych will probably like the stories better. The artwork is technically superb, as expected, though there's a sameness about some of the illos, as well. (You see one dreamy nude, you've seen them all. . . .) My own favorite is the spider woman, who is not only different from



anything else in the book but from most other illustrations as well. However, I'm sure that most male viewers won't be as critical and will like all the paintings; my co-workers did.

### **Disclosing the Past**

by Mary Leakey

Doubleday, \$15.95 (hardcover)

An autobiography. Science fiction frequently describes fictional scientists; here's a fascinating account of a real one. Women readers should appreciate her accomplishments. She grew up in England and France in the 1930s, had next to no formal schooling — she doesn't provide dates, but the total must have been around two years — and went on to become one of the world's foremost archaeologists. Her account of how it happened is thoroughly enjoyable, and there are both color and black-and-white photos to supplement the text. Highly recommended.

### **The Voice of the Mountain**

by Manly Wade Wellman

Doubleday, \$11.95 (hardcover)

John the Minstrel is back again, this time opposing a descendant of Micajah Harpe (who was an actual outlaw in the early 1800s). Harpe has a magic amulet and assorted books, and he is trying to acquire "The Gospel According to Judas," which will complete his magical arsenal and give him control of the world. Until he can get it, he sits on top of his mountain with a trio of acolytes and practices being evil. If the plot is a bit strained, the story itself is quite entertaining, with a good background of mountain lore and superstition.

### **The Tomb**

by F. Paul Wilson

Whispers Press, \$19.95 (hardcover)

I have a feeling that the author visualized this one as a movie, with Clint Eastwood as the hero. Well, if it gets made, I'll go see it. The hero is a sort of people's hit man; Repairman Jack "repairs" miscarriages of justice, making the punishment fit the crime whenever possible. In the course of the book, he's pitted against a disciple of Kali, who is determined to complete a vow of vengeance against a venial British officer and all his descendants. There are complications; the hero's girl friend who abhors violence, the villain's sister who falls for the hero, and the villain's nest of rakoshi, who help him achieve vengeance. (Rakoshi are Hindu demons, though in this version they're a bit more solid than that.) There's plenty of action, a good tight plot, and a climax of an exploding freighter that seems made for the big screen. Aside from an error about handguns, I found no flaws in it; it's an excellent adventure story.

### **Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand**

by Samuel R. Delany

Bantam, \$16.95 (hardcover)

The Bantam editor called this one Delany's best novel since *Dhalgren*, which wasn't really an inducement for me to read it. Once I got into it, though, it was interesting enough. It reads a bit like Delany's version of *The Stars My Destination*; not only is Rat Korga superficially similar to Gully Foyle, but the far-future setting and involved relationships seem familiar. However, the treatment and probably the author's intent are different. I say "probably" because this is the first half of a two-part novel — rather grandiosely referred to as a "diptych" — and comments on intent must wait until we see the rest of it. Emphasis is on the passions and intellect of the

individual characters, though apparently these passions will affect the course of human life in the galaxy. So far, my difficulty is that I can't really work up enough interest in any of the characters to give much of a faint damn what they're doing. Of course, reading it in bits and pieces during my lunch hours at work didn't help, either; I suspect this is a book one should concentrate on. But it's interesting, even in bits and pieces.

### **The Tides of Time**

by John Brunner

Del Rey, \$2.95 (paperback)

This one was fascinating right up to the explanation, which I considered one of the silliest things I'd read in years. Readers better versed in metaphysics may like the ending better — and whether you like the ending or not, the story is interesting enough.

The protagonists, on a small Mediterranean island, play out their problems in increasingly ancient environments, from near-present to the Roman era.

As a bonus, the book provides a graphic description of some of the realities of our "good old days" fantasies. Worth trying — though you might want to read the ending first, to prevent disappointment.

### **Half a Sky**

by R. A. Lafferty

Corroboree Press, \$25.00 (hardcover)

There's also a limited, signed edition (which is the one I bought, actually).

This is the second book of the Coscuin Chronicles, but don't let that deter you from trying it; you won't understand it any better for having read the first one. Personally, I find Lafferty's writing to be fascinating, whether I understand him or not. The first book in the series was *The Flame Is Green*, published in 1971; some of us have

been waiting a long time for the rest of the series. It will all appear; I'm told that Corroboree has the other two manuscripts on hand. Lafferty is the only major science-fiction writer producing surrealism — and definitely the only one who can make me like it. I understand few of his allusions — I'm told they're from conservative Catholic sources — but I like the way he puts words together, and the phrases that would make excellent sense if only the world was better arranged. The series is set in the years from 1845 to 1872, when a good share of the world was in an intellectual and political ferment. Coscuin is one of a group dedicated to guiding events along the correct path — Lafferty's correct path, not necessarily yours or mine. The characters are all larger or smaller than life, occasionally both at once. Try it.

### **The Atlas of Pern**

by Karen Wynn Fonstad

Ballantine, \$9.95 (paperback)

If you really want maps of every conceivable location on Pern, here they are. Like an atlas of real places, this has general maps of regions, followed by sets of maps for each general area — each book, in this case — plus such items as ocean currents, population and land use, and for good measure a diagram of a dragon's wing. I'm not an enthusiast of fictional maps, but those who should enjoy this one.

### **Sun's End**

by Richard Lupoff

Berkley, \$2.95 (paperback)

Dick and I were in a science-fiction fan club together, and later I wrote reviews for his fanzine, so I'm happy to have finally found one of his novels that I can review favorably; until now, I haven't liked them. This is the story of a Japanese-American electronics

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expert who is smashed up while working on space-station construction and wakes up eighty years later in a synthetic body. There is also a major problem — rather given away by the title — which colors everyone's actions. The background and characters are good, and I liked the fact that our hero-from-the-past doesn't immediately rush out and solve everyone's problems.

### **Them Bones**

by Howard Waldrop

Ace, \$2.95 (paperback)

Interesting idea. A deteriorating future has sent a single scout and then a group back in time to prevent World War III. The story is told from three viewpoints. The scout has landed in an alternate world, and the group has overshot its destination and landed around A.D. 1000; both are somewhat bewildered. The third viewpoint is that of a group of archaeologists in 1929 who start digging up dead horses and brass cartridge cases from an early Indian mound, and they're *really* bewildered. The conclusion isn't quite up to the rest of the book, but it's acceptable.

### **The Wild Ones**

by A. Bertram Chandler

Paul Collins, Pty. Ltd.,

\$5.95 Australian (paperback)

This is blurbed as Chandler's last completed novel; presumably there will be a U.S. edition eventually. It's a Grimes story, and very competently done; the writing evidently got slicker after I quit reading the series several years ago. The author describes this as "Middle Period Grimes"; in this particular story, the captain and shipmates tangle with a theocracy over the slaughter of possibly intelligent creatures. As the shipmates include a self-

aware robot and a pair of, er, kangaroid girls, they are more than academically interested in the protection of non-humans. Not a necessarily brilliant piece of fiction, but it is one that's fun to read.

### **Habitats**

edited by Susan Schwartz

Daw, \$2.75 (paperback)

An original-story anthology. Authors are Stan Schmidt, Tanith Lee, Ian Watson, Dean R. Lambe, Russell Griffin, Graham Diamond, Rachel Pollack, Jeffrey A. Carver, Scott Russell Sanders, Shariann Lewitt, and J. P. Boyd. The stories involve different habitations, and the variety possible is shown by Lee's "A Day in the Skin," about the human body as a habitat. The backgrounds vary from the usual regimented super-city to Lee's unique tale; most are original and well done. The plots aren't that good. Overall, Lee is excellent, Lewitt and Lambe good, Watson and Diamond I could have easily done without, and the rest are acceptable but not exceptional. This is an anthology that you read primarily for the ideas.

### **Alien Cargo**

by Theodore Sturgeon

Bluejay, \$14.95 (hardcover)

Sturgeon doesn't write much any more, so publishers reshuffle his old stories into new arrangements. Well, any Sturgeon story is worth being kept in print. This one contains "It," "Cargo," "Poker Face," "Microcosmic God," "Two Percent Inspiration," "Brat," "Medusa," "The Martian and the Moron," "Shadow, Shadow On The Wall," "The Travelling Crag," "The Touch of Your Hand," "Twink," "Bright Segment," and "Won't You Walk. . . ." If you haven't read them, do so.

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It's Spring, and awards are in the air. A gold-throated Hugo is nominating its lungs out on a nearby branch of the SF tree, while further up in the lofty heights, a speckled Nebula is ready to go in full award plumage. Also gearing up in song on various twigs of popularity are the didactic Jupiter, the staid John W. Campbell Memorial, the slightly weird Philip K. Dick Memorial, and way off on a fringe, the World Fantasy.

The annual flocking of the award birds also brings with it the usual parasitic mites (PR folk, news media), and bird droppings: the books and authors who don't get recognized. One such droppee is Tim Powers's *The Anubis Gates*, undoubtedly one of the finest SF/fantasy books of 1983.

1983? Aren't we talking about 1984 here? Almost, but not quite. You see, what may have kept *The Anubis Gates* from getting a fair share of recognition is a problem that similarly plagues other fine books. *The Anubis Gates* was published in December, 1983. That, in many cases, is far too late for it to get the kind of mass-reading needed for the proper awards recommendations and nominations.

Jury awards — that is, those awards that are chosen by a panel instead of by the membership of a certain group — are a partial solution. The only problem is that a jury for an award (and I've served on two) usually is so bogged down by year's end, under pressure to get their choices out and debated among the other jurors, that a late-comer may not get the full consideration it deserves. Despite this, *The Anubis Gates* won the Philip K. Dick Memorial Award for best paperback original, a juried award. But while that's a fine award, it doesn't yet carry

the prestige of a Hugo or Nebula, and books such as this deserve more.

This little commentary originally began as a review of Powers's book, but Buck beat me to it in his review in the July, 1984 issue of *Amazing*®: "It just might be the best book of the year." So I won't add anything to that, and let you discover the book for yourself.


I'm afraid I have no concrete solution to the awards problem — any attempt to choose the "best" of anything leads to logistical and subjective quagmires. But take this advice: don't avoid an unfamiliar author because there's no "name" or award listed on the cover. Check the publication date. It may just be a brilliant bird, out of season.

### **The Digging Leviathan**

by James P. Blaylock  
Ace, \$2.95 (paper)

James P. Blaylock's *The Digging Leviathan* shares a couple of characters with Powers's *The Anubis Gates* and the same publisher, but there the similarities come to a halt. It may be a mistake to read this book after Powers's, as I did; the styles are so different a reader can't help but be disappointed by the transition.

*The Digging Leviathan* is the story of one weird family, and specifically, one weird boy: Giles Peach, a kid with webbed fingers and a set of gills along either side of his neck. Peach lives in a near-contemporary Los Angeles suburb with a strange assortment of neighbors, relatives, and friends, and appears to have the power to make his dreams come true. Literally. The thing is, Peach dreams about digging to the center of the Earth, à la Edgar Rice Burroughs. And he's attracted some



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attention as a result.

The fact that this book shares some characters, or perhaps more aptly put, character references, with *The Anubis Gates* makes it something of a second-cousin. Neither book depends on the other in the slightest, and the references seem akin to an in-joke between Powers and Blaylock. Where *The Anubis Gates* is weird and tightly-plotted, *The Digging Leviathan* is weird and loose, a lunatic romp. And where Powers's novel is a neat, self-contained package, *The Digging Leviathan* ends where it should have begun, or at least ends a few chapters early. Getting there *is* a lot of the fun, but shouldn't have been *all* of it.

### **Eros Ascending**

by Mike Resnick

Phantasia Press, \$17.00 (cloth)

Signet, \$2.95 (paper)

### **Eros At Zenith**

by Mike Resnick

Phantasia Press, \$17.00 (cloth)

In an earlier column I praised Mike Resnick for not only writing fast-paced, entertaining SF, but adding some intelligence and thought as well. The book then was *The Branch*. I'm afraid I can't say exactly the same things about *Eros Ascending* and *Eros At Zenith*.

That isn't to say the books aren't good for what they are. The two are the first couple of volumes of a new series, *TALES OF THE VELVET COMET*. The Velvet Comet is an orbiting brothel, a pleasure palace for the very well-off. Both books chronicle attempts to close it down: in the first, by a financial saboteur, and in the second, which takes place some years later, by a detective who may cause its ruin by coming on board to solve a murder.

The stories are interesting and the

setting unique. But I had a hard time identifying with the point-of-view character in either book, though the first was better than the second. While Resnick tells you a lot about what the character *does*, there's a lack of information on how that character *feels*. That kept me from getting as involved with the story as I'd have liked to.

### **The Well of Darkness**

#### **The Search for Ka**

#### **Return to Eddarta**

by Randall Garrett and

Vicki Ann Heydron

Bantam, \$2.50 each (paper)

While we're talking series, a good example of getting into the minds of characters can be found in Garrett's and Heydron's *THE GANDALARA CYCLE*. *The Well of Darkness*, *The Search for Ka*, and *Return to Eddarta* are the fourth, fifth, and sixth books in the *CYCLE*; and while not as original on the whole as the first three, they're still a very good read.


A bit of background: Ricardo Carillo is on a cruise ship in contemporary times, sees a fireball overhead, and then wakes up on a strange desert. He's young again, healthy, and in an unfamiliar body — more unfamiliar because of the fact it's not quite human. He also discovers he's in the body of a man freshly dead, who's wanted for murder and the theft of a gemstone with unusual properties. Carillo, who takes on the name Rikardon, decides to find the gemstone, clear his name, and return the stone to its rightful keepers.

The three latest books are something of the take-a-step-forward-take-two-back variety. At the end of the third book, Rikardon and crew have the gem and are returning it. But by the fourth, they've lost it again, are recaptured by the folks who had the stone, and



# FIVE- TWELFTHS OF HEAVEN


MELISSA SCOTT



As fine a pilot as any man, Silence Leigh was barred nonetheless from captaining her own ship — because she was *not* a man. A ship of her own and freedom from the Hegemony's oppression were only dreams — unless she joined the rebels at Wrath-of-God and risked losing the starlanes forever. *By the author of The Game Beyond.*

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escape again. They go in search of an ancient city which holds the twin of the special sword Rikardon has and is a key to a similar "dual" personality in Tarani, Rikardon's female companion. They find the city, the sword — and in the sixth book, Tarani and Rikardon confront the folks who hold the gem for all the marbles.

These three books falter at the beginning because the story and the characters actually lose ground, perhaps for no greater reason than to get another book out of the series. But by the fifth book, things are starting to get moving again; and *Return to Eddarta* is easily the best of the bunch, because events that have been simmering come together in a full boil.

So the question is: are the six books so far worth reading? The answer: yes, if you enjoy an SF/fantasy adventure with telepathic tigers, swordplay, and the mystery of an unusual desert world. The books bog down a bit midway, but pick up again — and I'm told all will be wrapped up in the seventh and final installment.

### **Master of Space and Time**

by Rudy Rucker

Bluejay, \$14.95 (cloth)

Rudy Rucker's *Master of Space and Time* might easily be subtitled *Fun with Particle Physics*. Like several of the other books reviewed this column, it's fast-paced, but it's also a sideways send-up of what might be possible if the stuff that holds matter together — gluons — were commercially available, and someone decided they were the key to controlling all space and time.

For the sake of the book, Rucker makes those assumptions, and I'm not even going to try and figure out the science behind it (Rucker's a mathematician — I may have been trained in the same field, but I got out before it

was Too Late). A rather unstable inventor, his steady-but-skeptical sidekick and their lady friends all get caught up in the inventor's plan to use the gluons to magnify Planck's constant, so quantum uncertainty takes over in the area around the inventor, letting him essentially make up new rules for the universe before the effect wears off. The upshot is time travel and modifications not just in this universe, but in alternate universes; and an invasion; and questions about reality; and a lot more boisterous strangeness than I have room to go into here.

Let's just say that I can see why Rucker won the first-ever Philip K. Dick Memorial Award. Essentially it's a book that provides magic and miracles with what appears to be a solid scientific background and then doesn't even take that seriously. You don't need to take it seriously, either. Just pick up a copy and hang on for the ride.

### **Icehenge**

by Kim Stanley Robinson

Ace, \$2.95 (paper)

### **Frontera**

by Lewis Shiner

Baen, \$2.95 (paper)

Mars has always been a favorite of science-fiction writers — so near, yet so different. A lot of the mystery has been lost as we've learned more about the Red Planet, but that doesn't keep it from being an SF mainstay, in some cases more successfully than others.

An unsuccessful example that starts out with great promise is Kim Stanley Robinson's *Icehenge*. It's a classic case of what can happen when three shorter works are strung together to become a novel. Sometimes, plot elements get lost in the cracks. It begins with a mutiny by the Mars Starship Associa-

ion against the restrictive Committee that runs the Martian government. The MSA transforms its hijacked ships into a starship and heads out, leaving behind a planet-wide revolution. Then we jump ahead a few hundred years as a scientist tries to find out the truth about the revolution, and Icehenge is found — a Stonehenge-like structure on Pluto, surmised to have been constructed by the MSA rebels. In the third segment, we move ahead another few hundred years, as an expedition heads out to Icehenge to find the truth.

The flaw? Despite all the hinting, we never do find out what happened to the MSA ship. There are good, solid characterizations, some nice imagery, and three good stories. But no novel. The questions posed at the start that pique your interest aren't

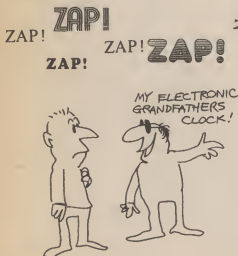
fully answered, and as thoughtful and well-written as the novel is otherwise, it fails on plotting.

Strong plotting in the political thriller vein is the hallmark of Lewis Shiner's *Frontera*. NASA goes belly-up, and leaves the first permanent Mars settlement stranded. A decade later, a private corporation decides to send a rescue mission to Mars. But unknown to even some crew members, the rescue mission has a darker purpose . . . a purpose worth killing for.

There are several stock components to the dialogue and to a few of the characters, but Shiner wraps the story in a compelling package. *Frontera* isn't the best or most thought-provoking novel ever set on Mars. Even so, its raw-edged energy holds your interest and keeps you turning the pages.

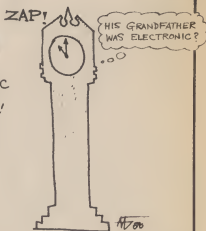
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## CARTOON



William Rotsler

## CARTOON



Alexis Gilliland

# Discussions

## by the Readers

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We editors of Amazing® appreciate all the thoughtful letters we receive, and we only wish that there were more of them. We appreciate them even more when they are neatly typed and double-spaced (which means to space between lines, not between words).

Matters of a business nature (subscription problems and the like) must go to the office of publication at P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147-0110. Letters to the editor may also be sent there, so the staff there can read them too before they forward them to us here in Philadelphia. Manuscripts, however, should come to us at P.O. Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101-8243 — but be sure that the address you use is that from a current issue of the magazine.

Of late we've been flooded by poetry manuscripts directed at us by World of Poetry Magazine. Apparently that publication failed to mention that manuscripts of every kind **MUST** be typed; that the typing must be double-spaced (between lines); that **ALL CAPITALS** are **NOT ACCEPTABLE**; and that a return envelope, with adequate postage affixed, is always required.

All of this has made us a lot more hostile to would-be poets than we'd like to be. (We've just returned — without reading — about 200 manuscripts of poetry that were in appalling format.) Hence, this reminder that the standards for manuscript preparation apply to poems as well as to prose — and especially so just now: you don't

want to be mistaken for one of Them, do you? And you certainly don't want to make a novel contribution to the problem, as did the writer of our first letter for this issue.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Editor,

The poem enclosed is one that came to me so forcefully at 2:00 A.M., July 17, 1984 that there was no more sleep for me until I had it down on paper.

I shall not try to explain it except to say that it certainly is a fantasy.

Since I always have a feeling that enclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope indicated that I have no faith in my own creation, I make a copy for myself and create no problem for you.

Respectfully,  
Ms. Glennie Todd Ziemann

What can we say? A more complete case of anti-salesmanship in a cover letter would be hard to produce in so few words. Regretfully you create a very big problem for editors by not sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope, especially if you want a reply. Not sending one does not indicate confidence. It indicates that you don't take your submission very seriously. Neither will the editor. We returned yours **unread**.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Amazing®:

Sometime during the late 1960s I sent for some Tarzan novels through the mail. Included on the order form,

found I believe in an issue of *Magnus*, was an advertisement for some of Burroughs's Mars books. Like many others before me, *A Princess of Mars* was my first exposure to science fiction. I was ten years old. Shortly after reading that novel, I came across a copy of an odd-looking magazine while I was shopping for comics. The cover depicted a helmetless astronaut (holding a flashlight?) being attacked by a headless mud-thing. In that issue was a satirical poem by Charles R. Tanner about — what else — *A Princess of Mars*. I paid the newsdealer the 35¢ for that issue of *Fantastic*™.

Anyway, I soon became a faithful reader of *Amazing*® and *Fantastic*™. When I could find them. The rejection that I received for a story that I sent to *Amazing*® (the only story I've ever sent out) is one of my treasured childhood mementos. The last copy of *Amazing*® that I purchased was one of the first non-Ted White issues. I purchased that at a newsstand, which isn't too odd until you realize that the newsstand was in Florence, Italy.

The other day I purchased the September issue at a NYC bookstore. I thought the magazine had folded; at least now I know where I can get the current issues. Did you miss me?

Very truly yours,  
Michael C. DeLisa  
Woodbury NY

Yes, we did miss you, and hope you'll stay around for a while.

— George H. Scithers

Gentlebeeing,

Thanks for printing my letter in the January '85 issue, it's the first time I've been in print since May '83.

I would like to point out, though, that I'm not the peacenik liberal you might think I am from reading that

letter. I'm not against nuclear weapons; and, in fact, I think they should have been used in Korea. (If you think back, you'll find that my stories were all very conservative: community safety was higher than individual needs in "Adequate Response" and marriage was something you kept even if you didn't live together in "Favor.")

Also, I was pointing out Ignatius Donnelly was writing a crude form of sci-fi a hundred years ago and he had the idea which Silverberg thought that real scientists discovered recently. I never suggested Donnelly was a real scientist (and there is talk that Donnelly was, in reality, written by Tesla).

Lastly, congratulations on the TV thing. It should make *Amazing*'s readership go up, and up, and up. (You don't think they'd look through back issues of the zine to find stories to buy, do you?) I just hope success doesn't spoil you anymore than perfection already has.

Keep up the good work on the zine.

Best wishes,  
J. Michael Matuszewicz

*The difference between Donnelly and a science-fiction writer is that Donnelly was not writing fiction, but pseudo-fact. He did not tell stories, but "reported" things which were not true, very much in the manner of today's UFO or Atlantis authors.*

*We're pleased and excited about the TV show too. But while the television people might use stories from *Amazing*® as readily as those from any other source, they have, after all, only licensed the use of the title.*

— George H. Scithers

*Amazing*®:

Fighting back wherever oppression strikes can keep me pretty busy. Just when I thought it might be safe to go

back to the bookstore, what do I find? A vicious case of anti-California regionalism in the November issue of *Amazing*®. My brain comes from California too and I don't think there's a mad scientist alive that wouldn't be pretty darn proud to use it as the central processing unit of a home-made humanoid.

How would you like it if someone made fun of where you were from? You wouldn't mind? Of course not; it's not a sore point for you because people haven't been making an issue of it, but I'm sure every Californian was deeply wounded by your offensive cartoon.

Peace and Love,  
Ti Di Sky  
Seattle WA

*Not every Californian obviously, because one of the perpetrators, William Rotsler, has lived in California all his life.*

— George H. Scithers

George,

Point: Your letter page seems to be an unpublished-writers' thrills-and-anguish therapy session. Is everyone who reads *Amazing*® an undiscovered writer, waiting and writing and waiting? I know I am. But come on, is the letter page the place for this rather vulgar outpouring of writer's grief? I shall not do it.

Silverberg's Opinion: In many ways I agree with Mr. Silverberg. Science Fiction is pooling into a stagnant pond, from which there is only a tiny rivulet of originality escaping. The hard truth, the sad truth is that all SF, all literature, all creative arts have always been this way. Golden ages seem to always be in the past. Could it be they are only filtered memories of times that were very much like the present?

Sucharitkul: This is a beautiful story — slow in starting, but worth the wait. It is a very old idea, this brain-in-the-spaceship; but Sucharitkul has turned the muddy, clichéd water into the finest old wine. Almost, he achieves his ideal of a universe of great pain and great beauty. The story awakened a longing in me similar in kind to the intimations of Wordsworth and Lewis.

But: this wordcombining has got to end. It is extremely focusfudging. After two or three pages of tumblejoy and whisperlyre the device becomes precious. Only Gerard Manley Hopkins could pull this off consistently and successfully; and Somtow, you ain't he.

The Chinese Diversion: Mr. Scithers, if this had been submitted by a user of the English language, would you have accepted it? It is horrible in the worst sort of teeth-grinding way. If this is representative, perhaps China deserves to be ignored by the science-fiction community.

Pearce: By far, this is the best story in the issue. This is what great fantasy is all about: the single, unavoidable, delightful, compelling suspension of disbelief. The characterization was exquisite, precise. The tension and conflict permeated the story and held it together like invisible glue. The story was organic, alive and intra-dependent; if you touched one part, the parts moved. But the ending: too bittersweet, slightly contrived.

Demand: This was probably a one-shot story from Pearce. Don't let it be. He has much to offer. Write him, call him, beg him for more. Pearce is a partial answer to Silverberg's editorial prayers.

Regards,  
Tony Daniel  
Birmingham AL

Actually, Gerald Pearce's first story seems to have been "The Dreaming Wall" in the May 1955 *Galaxy*. He just hasn't written nearly as much as we'd like him to.

No, this letter column isn't intended as *Unpublished Writer's Angst 101*. But it does seem that many of the letters we receive are from would-be writers, and since these are often interesting, we publish them.

— George H. Scithers

You make mention in the November 1984 issue of a book "on what we think works and what we think doesn't work in writing science fiction and fantasy." Could you please send me the title/author for this publication. I can use all the help available.

About this issue: Larry Walker's dragon piece was very well composed and witty. The ending was humorous, excellent. Sherman's "Medium" also

impressed me. Finally, thank you for giving readers the variety and novelty lacking in some other magazines in this genre, as exemplified by "But Wait! There's More!" Even my wife liked it. (She's beginning to come around . . .)

Sincerely,  
Tim Pirkle

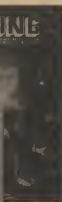
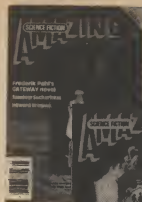
You're in luck. There are several books available on writing, and on writing science fiction specifically. Some we recommend are *The Craft of Science Fiction* edited by Reginald Bretnor (Harper and Row — out of print, but available from Owlswick Press), *On Writing Science Fiction* by George Scithers, Darrell Schweitzer, and John M. Ford (Owlswick Press), and *The Craft of Writing* by William Sloane (W.W. Norton & Co.).

— George H. Scithers

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Well, yes; we are looking for stories, and from people who have never sold a story before as well as from long-time professionals. But no; we do not want to see you make the same mistakes, over and over again. So; we wrote and printed an 11,000-word booklet, *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*, to assist you with manuscript format, cover letters, return envelopes, and other details of story submission, along with some ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. These cost us two dollars each, with mailing and handling; we'd appreciate receiving this amount (check or money order, please; it's never wise to send cash through the mail). If you want two copies, send us \$2.50; three copies, \$3.00; and so on: in other words, 50¢ for each *additional* copy after the first one, which is \$2.00. If you subscribe to *Amazing*® Science Fiction Stories today, we'll send you a copy of the booklet free.

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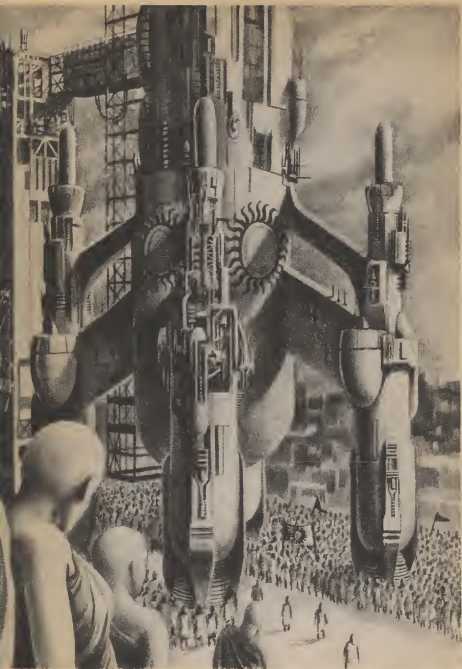
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**OFFERINGS AT MEDUSA**  
by Joel Henry Sherman  
art: Nicholas Jainschigg





*Joel Henry Sherman's first professional sale was "Medium," in our November 1984 issue. Here is his second.*

Jalo Kirsky had not realized the wound was so deep.

As he stood in the skirling snow of Hardcore winter, it came back to him, the pain and guilt he had hidden away so carefully behind a thick wall of travel and work, liquor and short-term affairs. He felt old and tired, all too aware of his crimes as the wind howled and moaned in the dark night. He walked up the stone staircase to the house, his footsteps ringing among the ghost echoes of Sarai's voice.

A servant met him at the door and escorted him down the dimly lit corridor to the quiet study. The room was as he remembered, rich with leather-bound books, a crackling fire in the huge, flagstoned hearth. It still felt comfortable.

Alaine stood before the fire, haloed by the flames. Shadows carved her thin face, accenting her prominent cheekbones. Her mouth was a taut line. She stared at him for a long moment, a phantom from the past. He thought of that night so long ago, before his beard was grayed and his body scarred by time. Jalo could think of nothing to say.

"So, Jalo," she said quietly. "You've finally come."

"I came as soon as I was contacted." He did not move near the woman, though the urge to hold her was strong.

"You weren't easy to find." She walked into the arc of light from the overhead lamps. Her face was tired, circles of sleeplessness beneath her eyes. He decided she was still beautiful.

"It's one of my talents."

"Sarai will need them all."

"Where is she?"

"On Faith." Her face was pale. He could see she was struggling to control her emotions. "Our daughter is making the pilgrimage to Medusa."

"Damn it!" He felt the blood drain from his face and a sickness spread through him. "How could you let this happen?"

"I did my best to stop her."

"As long as it didn't interfere with your duties as Commissioner," he said disgustedly.

Her dark eyes flashed, "Commissioner, yes. And Mother too. And more Father than you'll ever be. At least I was here."

Jalo could not reply. He stared silently into the fire, watching the flames flicker and dance.

"Arguing won't help Sarai," the woman said finally.

"You've spoken with her?"

"Yes." Her voice was bitter. "She tells me nothing. She has my logic and your stubbornness. She won't listen."

"What can be done legally?"

"She's untouchable. She's past the age of consent and the Order controls Faith."

"Surely you could have done something?"

Her face hardened, eyes narrowing. "I'm a politician, Jalo. You can't have forgotten. I pulled every string I could reach, but I can't get to her. It's your turn now to accept some small responsibility for her life."

"I'm here," he said. "I'll do what I can."

A silence lengthened between them. He resisted the urge to take the woman in his arms, standing with his fists clenched tightly at his sides.

"The pilgrimage will be leaving in six days."

"That's not much time." He looked down at his hands, pointedly remembering their last farewell. "I'd better be going." He turned to leave.

"Jalo," she said, touching his shoulder. "Bring Sarai back to me. That's all I ask . . . nothing more. Just bring me back my daughter."

He looked at her standing by the fire. She seemed suddenly frail and small. It was an illusion. "I will," he said, the sound of steel in his voice.

Jalo walked from the room, down the too familiar hallway to the front door. His footsteps were like gunshots on the stairs. Sarai was gone, maybe already dead. Responsibility cut him with a knife edge. He should not have left on that winter night so long ago, while the child slept and Alaine stood weeping in the study. Outside the snow was falling heavier, thick white flakes swirling around him. He pulled his collar tight against the sudden chill.

He came down in Revelations, the capitol of Faith. Light from the swollen red star which baked the planet painted the windows of the city with a molten glow. Jalo pushed his way through the narrow streets, past throngs of novices. Their brightly colored robes created a rainbow of reds, blues, and yellows, all the shades of the visible spectrum. Their scalps were shorn, diamonds of black painted over their eyes to make the whites prominent. The strains of their joyous songs followed him into the Authority complex.

The Authority Legal Affairs Officer on Faith was a slightly built man with a sad smile and a fatherly tone. He leaned back in his chair, peering at Jalo over the top of his pince-nez glasses. He listened attentively, nodding at the proper moments, mouthing occasional comments. But, it was obvious to Jalo, the man knew the story well and had prepared a response even before Jalo had spoken.

"Mr. Kirskey," the man said carefully. "You can't imagine the number of people who have come to me with similar problems. But my hands are tied. I can do nothing. Surely you know that?"

"I know my daughter is making a pilgrimage to Medusa . . . one from which she won't return. Medusa is a damned flare star! You're letting a ship-load of lunatics and children fly out to be consumed by a flare in the name of

religious freedom. You might as well be killing them yourself." He felt his face flushing with anger.

"Two hundred years of religious freedom have established certain precedents. Faith is very specific in its rulings on the matter." The man removed his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "The Order of Medusa owns Faith. The Authority maintains a small complex, but the Order conducts its own affairs. The Authority recognizes their right to mediate their own disputes." He shuffled through his papers. "I've explained all this to Commissioner Kirsky. Sarai is of age. If she wishes to follow the Blessed Parker and cleanse her spirit in the Holy Flames of Medusa, I can't stop her."

"What about a competency judgement?"

"A waste of time and effort. No judge on Faith would grant one. You'd have to get a judge on Hardcore or Kosar to make a ruling, then present it to the Faith officials, which would instigate new litigation. You'd be tied up in Authority courts for years. Meanwhile, Sarai completes her pilgrimage and all points are moot."

Jalo stood and leaned across the desk. "Then what can I do?"

"Legally?" The man slipped on his glasses. "Nothing. You've reached a dead end."

"But she's my daughter. Surely —"

"I'm very sorry. But Sarai has made her choice. She's not being forced to go."

"How do you know that?"

"Speak to them, Mr. Kirsky. Fear and hatred have caused a great deal of confusion about the Order, but they sincerely believe what they're doing is right."

"I don't." Jalo turned stiffly and walked to the door.

"Mr. Kirsky?" The man called as Jalo stepped into the hall. "If you're contemplating other action, a word of advice. You have no allies here. Faith is populated by members of the Order . . . and by the sick and the poor under the Order's care. If you take matters into your own hands, prosecution will be extremely swift and my defense limited."

"I'm no fool." Jalo smiled grimly. "I will do nothing on Faith." He pulled the door firmly shut behind him.

The Temple of Medusa was the center of Revelations. From the street, it was a maze of rooftops and towers, white stone turrets flying pennants of myriad hues. The bulk of Revelations consisted of drab, low structures housing supplies and electronics, entire windowless suburbs reserved for information storage and processing.

The Order was the great librarian of the galactic arm. In two hundred years, the church had compiled a vast storehouse of knowledge, information which it provided to subscribers at modest prices, guaranteeing a financial base from which to operate humanitarian functions — missions, hospitals,

and schools. Revelations was the informational nerve center. Every major corporation and government in known space journeyed to its doors to ask delphic questions and plan strategies based on the answers. The Order maintained a strict cordon between itself and petty politics, but no one denied its power.

He stood in the street for a time, watching the quiet procession of novices inside the walls, swaddled in their bright robes. It was a short walk up the stairs and into the gatehouse, yet Jalo could not find the strength to move. He searched the placid faces for Sarai and realized he was no longer certain of her features. He was afraid of the moment of confrontation, the instant when he would cease to be simply gifts and letters at Christmas and birth-days. What would they say to each other?

Jalo brooded silently, finally moving up the steps and into the gaping entrance of stone.

A novice cloaked in yellow sat behind a small desk, looking up at his footsteps. "Good day, Brother. How may I help you?" His age was indeterminate. His scalp had been depilated, skin dyed yellow, eyes painted with black stars. He smiled easily.

"I need to speak with someone," Jalo said carefully.

"Business or personal?"

"Personal."

He nodded. "Sister Moira is available, sir." He pointed down the corridor to his left. "Second door. Go right in."

"Thank you." Jalo followed his instructions, finding a small cubicle two doors down. The room was less than three meters square. The floor, ceiling, and three walls were starkly white.

A Byzantine-style mural of the Blessed Parker adorned the fourth wall. The scene was a favorite of the Order, Parker sitting next to the chest from which his disciples drew lots for the honor of accompanying him on his return to Medusa. Each detail was painstakingly rendered in tiny tesserae of colored glass. Parker was radiant in his white robes, his hairless skull crossed with ribbons of scar tissue, his eyes empty pits, mouth a lipless slash drawn into a tight rictus. The line of disciples stretched away from him into the ruddy distance until their number was lost on the horizon.

As Jalo stared at the grim visage of Parker, he was struck by the thread of chance which had brought him to this small room. Parker had been a navigator on a scientific mission studying the Medusan system. A thruster malfunctioned and stranded the craft in orbit around the star as it flared. Nine were killed, yet Parker had miraculously survived, blinded and horribly scarred. He believed divine intervention had saved him from the flames, sent him back to civilization to guide others on a new path to God. Establishing the Order of Medusa, he quickly gathered followers, some won by the power of his speeches, others by the charity of his fledgling church.

Two hundred years later, Medusa awaited another offering . . . Sarai.

Sister Moira arrived with a rustle of red robes. Her scalp was barren, glistening red, eyes rimmed with black. She bowed low to him and eased herself onto one of the stools. Jalo felt uncomfortable under her penetrating gaze.

"Do you seek understanding?" she asked after a minute of silence.

"Yes," he said. Jalo studied the woman closely, noting the wrinkles and the age in her face.

"Am I too old for your taste?" She smiled.

He shook his head. "I expected someone younger."

"The Order is not only for the young. We elderly have our place too."

"I would have thought you'd made your pilgrimage by now."

"There are many ways to serve." She shrugged. "Not all of us are pilgrims."

"Don't all strive for Medusa?"

"Each does in his own way. It's a common misconception. Not all seek the flames of Medusa. But many do."

"Why?" He watched her closely.

"Because it is the shortest path to God."

"To die by fire?"

"For hundreds of centuries humanity died by fasting, by sacrifice, by jihad in the name of God. This is no different." She pointed to the mural. "When God called the Blessed Parker back to the Holy Flames, one hundred thousand celebrants asked for the chance to return with him. Only a limited number could go: some had to remain behind to lead others. Through His wisdom, Parker revealed the lottery, and one hundred and fifty souls were spirited up with him from Medusa. Every year when the lottery comes, the streets are choked to see another pilgrimage." She raised her eyes slightly. "Medusa is not death. It's the path to new life."

"Yet you choose not to go."

Sister Moira stared at her hands. "Perhaps the day will come when my courage is as strong as my belief. Until then, I will serve in my own way." Her eyes narrowed. "Why have you come?"

"I seek understanding."

"There's something else. I've seen your kind before. You have no God. What do you want?"

"You have something of mine."

"A friend? A lover?"

"A child."

The woman nodded. "Perhaps I can arrange for you to speak with your child. What is the name?"

"Sarai Kirsky."

Sister Moira smiled. "I'm afraid you are too late. Sister Sarai left on pilgrimage two days ago." She touched him gently. "Do not grieve. Rejoice for Sarai. God has called her. She has found the fulfillment for which I feel you have long searched and may never find."



"When will they reach Medusa?" Jalo struggled to control his rage and revulsion.

"In time for the next flare . . . thirty-six hours from now. There will be a corresponding service should you wish a moment of reflection." The woman folded her hands and brought them to her lips. "If you could have only seen her face as she boarded the shuttle, you would know that Sarai is at peace. For her, the path to God is short and swift."

"She's only eighteen years old."

"And you are fifty? Fifty-one? Who is better prepared to meet Him?"

"I won't let you murder my daughter!"

"We're not killers, Mr. Kirsky." She smiled. "If you must, then go to Medusa. They will not be hard to find. Few ships seek the Holy Fire. See Sarai. Speak with her. She will make you understand."

"We will talk," Jalo said as he rose from the stool. "Good day." He turned and marched silently from the room.

The yacht phased in from jump space outside the gravity well of the star and rode in on thrusters. Jalo sat in the control room, view screens filled with filtered shots of Medusa. The hot young star resided in a diminishing cloud of aggregate gases, thinning each time the unstable orb erupted with another shell of energy, scouring the dark space clear of debris with the intense heat of stellar combustion. Pericles, a single battered planet, swung through its small orbit, pitted face subjected to the regular flares, scorched and burned with clockwork regularity, every sixty-eight hours when Medusa brightened.

Jalo realized he was seeing the same view the Blessed Parker had when his ship engines had malfunctioned and stranded the man and his hapless crew around the troubled star. What was it that could have driven Parker to such madness, made him so ill he wanted others to suffer the burning death of Medusa?

For a moment, Jalo envisioned his daughter, ironically still the child he remembered. She was aboard an old freighter, laughing with the robed strangers around her. The heat of Medusa licked out and blackened her skin, peeling her flesh away with a crackle of guttering fat. In the last instant of horror, Sarai realized her mistake. There was no parent present to correct her error.

Rage and disgust rose quickly inside him. Jalo shrugged them away. Her only salvation lay in his ability to think clearly. He checked the time and found eighteen hours remaining before flare. He was nine hours away from the freighter, moving steadily toward Medusa. If he could reach them and bring Sarai aboard, there was a narrow possibility of reaching the edge of Medusa's gravity distortion in time to jump before the flare energy reached them. He stared at the controls and found he could nurse no more from the thrusters, even with curses. Grimly, he went to the armory to check his

weapons.

Jalo reached the freighter just inside the orbit of Pericles. Light glittered from the surface of the ship, a huge octagonal prism of steel, bulbous pod of the bridge protruding from one end, facing into Medusa. It was symbolic of the religion, he thought. An outdated hulk, stripped of all gear and ornamentation, destined for the scrapyards until purchased by the Order for one final trip. A kamikaze ship with failing engines and only enough fuel and air to reach Medusa. Yet for the Brethren who had slaved and struggled to purchase the ailing craft, prayed for the fortune to have their names drawn in the lottery, the ship was a pipeline to God.

The docking unit was a universal design and mated easily with the yacht. Jalo checked the chronometer and found nine hours and twelve minutes to flare. He had fifteen minutes to find Sarai and try to run for the edge of the system. He strapped on his weapon as he stepped into the airlock.

One man waited for him inside the transport. His head was shaved, scalp and face painted white to match his brilliant robe, the white hot color of Medusa. Stars of silver were painted around his eyes, flickering as he moved, robes fluttering. He did not block the entrance, a gentle reproof in his face.

"Why have you come, Brother?" he asked, voice soft.

Jalo touched his weapon. In the distance, he heard strains of song echoing down the sterile corridor. "There's one I must see."

"You have little time. The Flare of the Holy One comes soon. It is not for the unprepared."

"Sister Moira sent me. I must see her." He narrowed his gaze. "I must see Sarai Kirskey."

"One moment please." The man disappeared down the corridor.

Jalo waited, studying the chamber. It was as he expected, austere and stark, stripped of all accessories. Wires protruded from the panel where the intercom had once rested. Every other light fixture had been removed, casting gaps of shadow down the hallway. Holes in the bulkhead marked the locations of the suit lockers and dressing benches, torn out as unnecessary on a death ship.

The wait was not long.

She came down the corridor, followed by the other novice. The woman was small, wrapped in a white robe which clung to a figure much like Alaine's. He found the child in her face and recognized his daughter.

She studied him for a moment. The silver glitter around her eyes sparkled as she moved. "You've come a long way, Father."

"I have." He nodded. "I've come to take you home."

"Just like that?"

"There's no time to argue."

She smiled slowly and shook her head. "I'm sorry you traveled so far for

nothing. I'm not leaving with you. Give my love to Mother . . . if you see her again. Goodbye, Father." Sarai turned to leave.

"Wait!" Jalo reached to grab her shoulder, but the novice intervened, stepping in to block his arm.

"You must go," the man insisted.

"Not without Sarai." The woman stopped at her name, stood staring at them from the shadow-carved hallway.

"The flare comes soon. Go now, before it is too late. The flare is only for the Chosen."

"Only for fools," Jalo said bitterly. "I've come for my daughter. Don't try to stop me."

The man stared at him. "Would you take your daughter from the path she has chosen?"

"If it's the wrong path."

"How can you know that?"

"Because suicide is morally wrong," Jalo snarled through clenched teeth. "The rest of you can run from life into Medusa. But I won't let Sarai follow you."

"You would keep her from reaching God?"

"I'll keep her from seeing Hell."

The man shook his head sadly. "You cannot understand." His words were filled with pity. "You flex your muscles and wave your gun . . . force reality to comply with your standards. God is not in a room somewhere, Mr. Kirsky. He is where you choose to see him." The man turned away and started back into the interior of the ship. "Go away, Mr. Kirsky. You have come for nothing. No one wishes to return with you."

The charge from his gun lanced a small, smoking hole into the deck in front of the man. He looked at Jalo, no fear in his eyes, white features void of emotion.

"I'm here out of love," Jalo said evenly, gun leveled at the man's chest. "But I've traveled a long way and I'll take Sarai back, even if I have to kill you and everyone else on this ship."

A grin spread across the man's white face. "We're already headed toward a death by flame. Can death at your hands be worse? Go ahead, Mr. Kirsky. Shoot."

"Then let the flare come and collect corpses." His grip tightened on the weapon. A long silence stretched in the room.

"Stop it, Father." Sarai walked to him.

"Only you can stop me, Sarai." He did not lower the weapon.

"What is the point? You can't keep me from returning to the Order." The lights gleamed on her painted face.

"I can keep you alive."

"After all you've done in the past, who are you to judge the sanctity of life?"

"Shut up!" His voice seethed with rage. "I'm the one with the weapon, so make up your mind. Come with me or I'll take you after the others are dead."

Sarai drew a deep breath. For a long moment, she looked from the novice to Jalo, chewing her lip. "I'll go."

"No, Sarai," the man said, turning away from Jalo. "Don't let him do this to you. You'll never be chosen again."

"Perhaps I was not meant to be chosen." She touched his cheek. "God must have other uses for me. We will all be united someday." Sarai stared defiantly at Jalo. "Let's go."

"Are you certain?" The novice held her arm.

"Yes."

"Goodbye, Sister Sarai." The novice looked at Jalo. "Do not try to outrun the flare, Mr. Kirsky. You would not reach the edge of the system in time. Seek refuge in the shadow of Pericles until it subsides."

"You'd save my life?"

"You misunderstand us, Mr. Kirsky. The Order has no desire to see you dead. We have chosen different paths. I cannot say which is right and which wrong. Goodbye, Mr. Kirsky."

Jalo nodded cautiously. He let Sarai pass, watched to see they would not be followed, and hurried after the girl. As the airlock slammed shut and cycled, he heard the chanting again, lingering even after the seal was complete.

He directed Sarai to the bridge. She moved mechanically, avoiding his gaze.

"Strap in," he ordered.

She clicked the buckles stoically into place. He fastened his own and released the docking unit, the yacht pulling free of the air lock. For an instant, the freighter was framed against the white glare of Medusa, a tableau of light and shadow surrounded by a corona of diamond fire. Her sobs came suddenly, the placid mask cracking, tears streaming down her cheeks and smearing her make-up.

"I know you don't understand," he said softly. "Hate me if you want. Hate me forever. Raise children and grandchildren to hate me. Make it your purpose for life. It is not such a bad reason for living."

"How could I hate you?" Flecks of silver and white streaked her face, paths of flesh appearing beneath her eyes. "You are an instrument of God. I could no more hate you than my own arm." She wiped her face with her hands. "It is you who will never truly understand."

Sarai turned away from him to watch the transport grow small with distance. Gradually her sobs subsided and she drifted off to sleep, leaving him alone with his thoughts and the long hours of transit.

The thrill of victory eluded him, no adrenaline rush coming to drown the emotions stirring in him. Jalo saw his past as a handful of windborne dust,

too thin to be gathered and no protection against an equally nebulous future. He wondered idly if Alaine would consider his return. Did he even have the courage to try? It did not matter, Sarai was alive; and, secure in that knowledge, Jalo Kirsky turned the ship toward the ravaged face of Pericles.



## FIELD GUIDE

Oversize dragonflies  
Laid out in pieces.  
What are they doing here?  
Wire webs cut them.  
Who strung the wires?  
A star crew that landed.  
What did they hear?  
Whirring like windmills;  
Here are the pieces:  
Fender-strong thorax,  
Stinger and mandible,  
Balsa-weight legs  
Of ebony sheen.  
Where are the wings?  
Stacked in a corner.  
Some have been bolted  
To a nacelle.  
Here is the generator,  
There the transformer.  
Theories are useless;  
Where did they go?  
A dinosaur ate them  
But left all the pieces  
Including the dragon  
That some of them fashioned.  
Here it comes now,  
Another just like it.  
Where are their masters?  
What if they mate?

— John Devin

# THE WEREBEAR AND THE RAINBOW

by J. P. Boyd

art: Stephen Fabian

*Dr. Boyd has just been promoted to Associate Professor of Atmospheric and Oceanic Science at the University of Michigan. He reports that it has been a busy year.*

Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Magic  
Unearthly Chaumaturgy Building  
School of Technical and Applied Sorcery  
University of Michigan

May 12, 1982

Dean Rollo Caspar  
Department of Crystal Prophecy  
University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
#14 Street of the Dragon

My dear Rollo,

You have probably heard of the unfortunate deluge that flooded the Dean's residence and those of several senior professors. Well, I *am* partly to blame, but if I had not been there to — but it all really began when my young colleague Roger Tancred discovered that he was a werebear.

"My condition is mighty hard on my wardrobe, Abbott," he observed sadly in my office while brushing away the remnants of his best remaining suit. He had felt the transfiguration coming on at the lab party and had bolted into my office in the nick of time — but too late for his apparel. He was also too much for my spare chair, now lying in fragments near my bookshelf, and he was sitting on the floor. In his were-state, he was two-and-a-half meters tall and weighed nearly two hundred and fifty kilograms.

"I wouldn't mind it so much if it weren't for Penny."

For some months, Roger had been shyly courting an assistant professor in the department of Romance Languages and Literature. Like him, she was said to be a fine young scholar, and I thoroughly approved. But Roger was glum.

"She's in the humanities, and it's very different from our school where every professor is a magician. In her field, hardly anyone has the Talent, and the few that do are regarded with suspicion. What will she do when she finds out my secret?"



I was sorely tempted to point out that Penny had a secret of her own which a sorcerer as gifted as Roger really ought to have seen for himself if he had not been so preoccupied and also to remind him that in any event, women in love will endure much. But I let him go on instead.

"Are you familiar with Evan-Thomas's theory of lycanthropy?"

I nodded sagely, for that worthy, who held the chair of Lycanthropy and Thaumaturgical Transfigurations at the University of Bristol, was an old friend. At a congress of sorcerers, he had once changed into a werewolf right in the middle of the cocktail hour. He turned back almost immediately, plucked off the rags of his clothes, lifted a fresh drink from a passing tray, and resumed his conversation in mid-sentence while waiting for the valet to return with a change of clothes. Never did I know a man with so much dignity in a state of *dishabille*.

"Afterwards, he confided to me that his serum for lycanthropy was 'still in the testing stage'."

Roger nodded his snout in agreement. "It's now widely available. Werewolves are quite common and with Evan-Thomas himself being one — but for werebears and weretigers and werefalcons and the rest, there's nothing at all."

He beat his paw against the wall in frustration, and the whole building shuddered. Hastily, I inquired why his peculiar gift had not surfaced earlier, in adolescence.

"Evan-Thomas believes that the genes for lycanthropy and ursanthropy and all the other creatures of the were-kingdom are recessive. One becomes a werewolf only if one receives the gene from both parents. However, if one is magically active, then for a person with but a single gene, the repeated use of the Talent can, in Evan-Thomas's words, 'develop the latent gift'."

Roger let out a great bearish sigh. "You see, it's the magic that's the problem."

At last, I understood. Charms and amulets against magic have been worn for thousands of years. Wizards often wear them when binding spells to protect themselves from the power of their own magic; and in a much more complicated way, that was Roger's problem, too. I pondered.

"Perhaps I *can* do something, Roger."

He was so grateful that he quite forgot himself and shattered my blackboard with one expansive sweep of his paw; but after he reverted, I was able to sneak him home without further mishap.

The following day, after a little research, I had my man and went down to the Central Campus to see him. The Department of Alchemy was housed in an enormous pile of stone and masonry of indeterminate but venerable age which had been refurbished into the form of a



medieval castle. The moat was only five meters wide, but it was inhabited by a charming mixture of piranha, water serpents, and a species of dwarf kraken, who all got along famously. The water barrier was very useful for confining the results of some of the department's more off-the-wall experiments, but the giant hornsmiths who stood on guard on either side of the drawbridge added the real touch of class. Half again as tall as a man, silent as statues, their four wings and six arms at rigid attention with iron-tipped javelins in their right arms and war axes in the left, they contributed greatly to the dignity and professional aura of the structure.

A little envious, I went in; and the senior of the hornsmiths recognized me and snarled politely. I found my friend Armand Termagant on the little arrowslit-ringed balcony outside his office, correcting examinations. Just as I sat down, there was a shattering explosion and a massive workbench and a rather agitated undergraduate were blown through a window a couple of stories up. The bench plunged into the moat with a tremendous splash; and there was a sudden frenzy of roiling water in the area as the piranha, water-serpents, and kraken got together over lunch. The young man, however, landed on the well-tended lawns that make our campus so scenic.

A few moments later, while Armand was still tidying up the papers that had been blown about, several teaching fellows ran across the drawbridge carrying something in a sack, unrolled a carpet, paused a moment until the boy-djinn had popped up out of nothing, and then sped off.

Armand shrugged. "Undergraduates. We lose two or three a week near the end of the term. But they'll take care of it over in Necromancy. Professional courtesy."

"But what if one lands in the moat?"

Armand smiled cynically. "The School *is* overcrowded."

However, he did listen quite patiently to my problem; and by the time I had finished, the results were all that I could have asked for. His eyes had the bright, peculiar gleam of a kitten sneaking up on a mouse.

"Yes. I think it can be done. Rather easily, in fact. But what a fresh idea. No one's made an amulet quite like that before. This will be well worth publishing if I can bring it off."

Armand proved as good as his word; but when I returned to the Department of Alchemy a month later, he promptly put me to work.

"Direct moonlight triggers the transfiguration; any sort of fog or cloud cover, even if the moon is still visible through the haze, will keep your friend in his accustomed shape. But weather-witching is your line of work, so I need your help in binding the last spell."

I gladly complied, little knowing that I was casting one of our senior Deans upon the waters — but I get ahead of myself.

Roger was overjoyed to receive the amulet, a large golden medallion he wore under his shirt; and though his courtship proceeded slowly, with dignity, for he is as shy as he is gifted, a great worry had been lifted from his mind. One evening before a party at Dean Tedric's mansion — I can never remember exactly what he is Dean *of* — Roger asked me to come over early to his house for tea.

He was still almost embarrassingly grateful for my help — “In three months, I haven't changed once!” — but Penny seemed to have something on her mind that she couldn't quite bring herself to tell him.

“It's as if our relationship is stuck on a plateau. We're still close, but we're not getting any closer.”

I couldn't tell the truth, of course, without betraying a confidence; but I did reassure him. “All friendships, whether romantic or not, go through this sort of stage, sometimes several times. Soon, some special evening will break through the barriers of your mutual shyness, and you'll be again at ease with one another but on a deeper level.”

Alas, that special evening was also the occasion of a very unusual regatta — as the Dean's furniture raced headlong on the flood — but I am but a simple mage and thaumaturgical prophecy is quite beyond me. When Roger was called away abruptly to rescue his colleague Evan from a laboratory exercise gone awry, his spirits were much improved and I was pleased.

“I know Dean Tedric's is just up the hill,” Roger lived as a boarder in a magnificent old house on the bottom of faculty row with a kindly, white-haired widow named Mrs. Gray, “but could you take this book to Penny's? I conjured up a bibliophile of three centuries ago to fetch it from his personal collection Down There.”

Indeed, the book of sonnets *was* a bit singed, but it was covered with lovely panel-tooled leather depicting a magical rainbow covering the sun.

I had taught Penny the rainbow spell myself, a flashy bit of sorcery much favored by the great mages of the Renaissance; and as I walked over to her apartment, I fancied myself a wizard of those times. What a splendid presence I would have made in plate and mail — for you know that I am a tall man. My coat of arms? A lightning bolt and a gust of rain trampling a dragon, for I am after all chiefly a sorcerer of wind and weather.

Penny was much amused when I told her my daydream, and gave me that lop-sided grin that Roger found so charming.

“I'm sorry to deflate your fancy, Abbott; but actually the wizards never wore armor. The rainbow spell was popular in the time of the

*condottieri*, the mercenaries who viewed war strictly as a way of making a living. The sorcerers would duel in the sky, each trying to make a greater sign than the other — and then the knights and pikemen of the loser would peacefully lay down their arms, chat a bit with old friends among their captors, and ride off to the next job. For sixty years, Italy was very peaceful, and the *canzoni* and sonnets of the time are gentle and full of love. Maybe that's why I like the period so much."

Alas, poor daydream. I pulled myself together and put Sir Abbott out of mind as she locked her door — not with a spell, much to my surprise, but with an ordinary key.

"Have you thought it over, Penny?"

"Yes, and I know I ought to tell him. But it doesn't seem right, somehow. Outside of what I use in my literary research, the rainbow spell is practically all I know. I've never thought of myself as a real magician."

"But time-binding requires Talent of a very high order."

She nodded. "But even at that, I can only do a little. I can't chase battle-axes through their past the way Prof. Porter used to. I can only sit in a room with a focus, such as that very old book you brought me, and close my eyes until I see what the poet saw four hundred years ago when he wrote his poem. Then I try to correlate my vision with the historical records to develop a deeper understanding of the poem, but sometimes it isn't easy."

"Because a poet sees a plain girl as beautiful."

She grinned again. "Yes, I used to feel I was snooping, but then I realized that I would never see anything if the poet wished to keep his vision to himself. But an artist is a sharer of feelings."

She paused for a moment, then went on: "But Roger can raise ghosts and skeletons from the netherworld, and you can battle with the fury of thunder and rain. I'm just not in the same class!"

I started to reply, but suddenly a broomstick zoomed overhead and interrupted me. In the moonlight, we could see its young passenger was hanging head down from the handle, holding on for dear life. A few moments later, Evan Whiteflower, a colleague of Roger's in the Department of Necromancy, whizzed above us; and faintly, we could hear him calling out, "Hang on! I'm coming!"

We both laughed and I said, while she was wiping her eyes, "Our co-eds. But Roger will find them and get the girl to the ground safely."

She nodded, then was shaken by another fit of laughing. "But how will he ever keep his face straight while he's doing it?"

When we reached the Dean's, she excused herself to talk with Rachel Whitham of the English department and wait for Roger. I

found Armand already into his second drink, and he greeted me with a hearty slap on the back.

"Great party, isn't it?"

I rolled my eyes to Heaven — for you know that I am an abstainer — and accepted a tall glass of ginger ale.

When Armand had listened to my tale of Penny and Roger, he shook his head in disbelief. "Well, why doesn't she simply tell him, for goodness' sake? It's no disgrace to be a magician."

There are those who argue that Armand has spent most of his professional career trying to prove the opposite; but still, he had a point.

"It isn't that simple, Armand. For one thing, they're both at that stage in love of almost morbid sensitivity to the other's feelings. For another, no one else in her family for at least three generations on either side has had the Talent. It wasn't discovered that she did until she was routinely tested with the rest of her class when she was twelve. Her parents, who are very well-read themselves, were proud of her reading; but magic baffled them, and they felt a little guilty because they couldn't help her. Now she feels a little guilty, too."

Armand nodded sympathetically. "Poor thing. Not like Basil."

Armand is inordinately fond of his little nephew, who lives right here in town and, like so many children with the Talent, had powers of telekinesis while young.

"Five balls in the air at once, Abbott, and only a year old. Remember?"

"Indeed I do. After he recognized you, we spent the next five minutes playing dodgeball."

Armand looked hurt. "Well, they all missed."

"Until your sister Lillian came in with the pie."

Armand's smile brightened. "I didn't think he could lift anything that heavy. But what a chip off the old block!"

"Lordy, I hope not."

Armand scowled, but he refrained from saying anything because he saw Roger shaking hands with Dean Tedric in the hall. "There he is now." He looked rapidly in several directions. "I wonder where Penny is?"

We never found out, because the parlor window behind us erupted in a shower of glass as a full-sized flying carpet demolished the window, a table of drinks, and bowled over several miscellaneous guests before fetching up against a bad copy of Brueghel's *Fall of Icarus* which hung from the far wall. On the way, the carpet's lone passenger, who had evidently given his djinn the night off, back-somersaulted onto the Dean's rug.

As I stood there dumb-founded, Armand — whose presence of

mind has saved him time and again when confronted by irate husbands and disgruntled boyfriends — calmly took a sip of his drink, put it down, and helped the very wobbly driver to his feet.

"Hello, Winslow. It's hard to judge distance in the dark."

Winslow del Gatlin, one of the university's most distinguished thaumaturgists, rubbed his head, looked at the wreckage, and sighed.

Dean Tedric, an enormous red-faced man in an immaculate tuxedo, rushed up and wrung his hands. "My party! The window!" He rushed around wildly helping other guests to their feet. "Oh, Dean McWilliams, I'm so sorry —"

Armand discreetly steered Winslow upstairs and motioned me to follow. While we were cleaning him off — which was quite an effort, since he smelled of cognac, sherry, and at least three different types of red wine after his collision with the Dean's hospitality — he said confusedly, "I'm afraid, Abbott, that I have a well-deserved reputation for being the only person on campus who's more oblivious to his surroundings than you are. But usually not while I'm flying."

Indeed, he was a most prudent and sober man. Now if it had been Armand . . . Fortunately, the Dean had restored decorum by unveiling his masterpiece, and it pumped fresh life into the party most wonderfully. After he had been down for a few minutes, Winslow relaxed and soon was obviously enjoying himself.

Armand and I had missed the Dean's little speech, but Armand had already told me about it. The Dean's special touch this time was ensorceled champagne, a deep Burgundy red in color, but with the "sparkle and taste of the finest pale French vintage," according to Armand, who Heaven knows is an expert.

"Took a few hours of binding spells to set that up, I can tell you." As an alchemist himself, Armand was deeply respectful. "Even the Dean took a turn, according to Gregor."

Gregor Arimisian was a colleague of Armand's in the Department of Alchemy, a gourmet and *bon vivant* of legendary proportions (and girth!). How he must have enjoyed presiding over a thaumaturgical wine-making! Poor Armand was a little jealous.

He relieved his frustrations by drinking prodigious quantities of the wine; but to my surprise, the level in the punch bowls stayed the same.

"Cornucopia spell, Abbott. Easy magic. The bowl will fill itself indefinitely until the spell wears off in a couple of days."

"Bit risky, isn't it. Overflow?"

We were both thinking of a barbecue thrown by a professor in the College of Literature and the Black Arts a couple of years ago. The show-off ensorceled a huge horn-of-plenty — it really *was* a horn — which spilled out corncobs, potatoes, and raw sirloin steak in limitless abundance. Unfortunately, he botched the flame-and-hearth spell after

his charcoal went out, and it took three days just to clear the street of corncobs. But while the steaks lasted, the neighborhood dogs at least were in Heaven.

Armand pondered for a moment, then shook his head. He considers deanship to be the last refuge of the scoundrel, the superannuated, and the plain incompetent, which is true only about half the time; but he had some faith in Gregor. "*He*, at least, is a real alchemist, even if our distinguished host is little better than a snake-charmer."

A moment later, to my great surprise, something caught his eye which took him away from the serious business of drinking. I followed him out into the hall and saw Giles Samothrace of History holding an impressive medieval battle-axe and lecturing to a small knot of followers.

"I can only stay a few minutes because we're leaving tonight for Brittany to time-trace the life history and geographical movements of this magnificent tin-basher. It once belonged to Henri, Count of Anjou, so it should give us all kinds of valuable insights into the life and times of his dynasty. He — "

I whispered into Armand's ear. He listened for a few more seconds and then joined me back in the living room.

"You're right. Rather boring. Rufus Porter used to do that same kind of time-binding when he was here, didn't he?"

"Yes." Poor Rufus. He had a real flair for conventional archaeology, and he eventually learned how to bind a time-trace to an artifact, but he never had either the Talent or the patience to suspend the flight of the pottery until he caught up. "He was chasing a barley pestle one day across modern Bagdad and his djinn rammed their carpet right into a chimney. In falling off the roof, he bruised himself severely; but he went after it on foot, screaming 'Wait! Wait!' through the bazaar until he ran right into the river and drowned."

"What a way to go." Armand was thoroughly unsympathetic.

I nodded sadly. "He visits me now and then in my office; after Macaddewise, he's probably my most frequent spectral visitor."

Armand raised his eyes to Heaven — for admittedly, the late Macaddewise was and is something of a curmudgeon — and muttered, "The ghosts you know!"

He intended further comment, but we both heard running feet in the parlor. Armand, who was by then more than a bit mellow, started towards the hall; but at the last moment, I saw a flash of metal.

I tackled him just as it zoomed overhead.

Armand sat up and rubbed his head. "For a person of mature years, you move with great agility, Abbott. What the hell was that?"

I started to reply, but the sound of splintering glass and a rain of whisky, chablis, and shards of crystal pre-empted me as the battle-axe

whizzed by again and demolished a whole table of liquor. Poor Winslow had already made major inroads on the Dean's generous wine-cellar, and this second destruction of good spirits had Armand fighting mad. "That does it, Abbott: I'm —"

I pulled him down again just in time to avoid losing his head, and he reconsidered. "Hmm. Perhaps this does demand a little strategy."

"The suits of armor in the hall, Armand?"

"The very thing." The Dean flanked the lower end of his spiral stairs with matching suits of armor in the seventeenth century puff-and-slash style of plate. We crawled out into the hall, took the helmets and gauntlets, and waited for the battle-axe.

"Now, Abbott!"

I stood up at just the right moment, grabbed the haft — and was completely bowled over. I had slowed it just enough for Armand to get a good grip on it, and it went off, very slowly, back towards the parlour with a puffing and pulling alchemist in tow.

I bounded up and heard a wild commotion just after he had disappeared into the parlour. Roger stopped me at the door.

"It's okay, Abbott; we've got it under control. Would you tell the djinn outside that we may be a few more minutes?"

I was still hot for action, but I nodded and complied. The djinn who was to chauffeur Giles and his party across the ocean on an over-sized carpet was large even for a full-grown genie. The carpet was floating about two meters off the ground, and he was reading a Silver Surfer comic book and drinking beer. If he was surprised to be addressed by someone wearing a pointed steel helmet of the Age of Kings and articulated mail gauntlets, he did not show it.

"Your boss was demonstrating a spell, apparently; and it went a bit askew; but he'll be out presently."

The djinn merely grunted.

"An American beer?"

The djinn shrugged and scratched his enormous bare belly contentedly. "It's in our contract."

I was vaguely disappointed that he wasn't drinking some exotic beverage from the city of caliphs; but then, Middle Eastern spirits haven't been what they were before the region went Islamic; and the poor djinn must have endured a very long dry spell.

There were sounds of anguish from inside, one blood-curdling yell, and the ringing whang of metal on metal. I waved and said, "I'd better get back."

The djinn merely grunted and turned the page. He did not seem to be a very fast reader.

Finally, I could stand it no more. "You're taking this very calmly. Your master is desperately embarrassed, perhaps cut to ribbons by his

own spell; and you sit here reading."

The djinn shrugged. "I used to work for a variety of masters in the Legion, but afterwards, I couldn't hold anything steady. Too dull. But you profs are even better than Capitaine Delecluse, Mad Michel to his intimates."

"The Legion?"

The djinn smiled cynically and brushed the tassel of his turban out of his eye. "North Africa was pretty lively in the late nineteenth century. Poor Michel was roasted over a fire of camel dung. But he was fun while he lasted."

I felt I ought to say something in Giles's defense, but then a procession emerged from the house: two skeletons carefully holding the battle-axe while Armand, still in his helmet, walked alongside. A couple of steps behind them, Roger was controlling his skeletons with his wand.

Armand spoke to the djinn. "Your master is upstairs having certain, er, minor injuries attended to." He looked at me and sighed. "He bled all over the Dean's new rug, but it's nothing serious provided that we can get him away before His Deanship finds out."

Once inside, I rather expected to find the party dissolving, but I was quite mistaken; the combination of excitement and unlimited quantities of spirits insured that it had indeed just begun. I had finally doffed my helmet and gauntlets and enjoyed some excellent conversations with various mages when Armand, who was by then a bit wobbly, tapped me on the shoulder. He was trying to focus his eyes very hard on the punchbowl and didn't seem to be making much progress.

"Abbott, is the champagne *really* trying to climb out of the punch bowl?"

Indeed it was, and I went over for a closer look. A tongue of rich Burgundy, thick and slow-flowing like honey, but flecked with a million tiny bubbles that glinted like amber-embedded diamonds, lapped over the edges of the bowl and onto the Dean's Persian carpet. It flowed much more freely on the rug and I appreciated the significance of this immediately.

"It's a non-Newtonian fluid, Armand. Its viscosity depends on the shear stress: like quicksand, which becomes thicker when you flail around in it, or ketchup, which becomes thinner and flows more freely when you shake it. The self-siphoning effect shows clearly that — " As I warmed to the subject — for you know that I am a very scholarly man — I began the sweeping arm gestures, dramatic pauses, and rhetorical flourishes that can only be properly developed by teaching a 9 A.M. class of bored and sleepy undergraduates. Armand was still looking past me, eyes growing wider and wider; and I had just finished



making the connection between the theo-cartographer Isaac Newton, mud-slides, and the ballpoint pen when I suddenly realized my feet were wet.

"I don't think it's merely a matter of natural philosophy, Abbott. Look!"

Indeed, wine *was* erupting from the bowl at an alarming rate. The cornucopia spell ran amok. "Mm. Perhaps you're right, Armand. Conservation of mass is an important principle in natural philosophy. There's a fine, scholarly article in *Zeitschrift für Physik* which — " But I was not allowed to finish, for Armand rudely grabbed my arm and dragged me after him with the crowd retreating up the stairs to the mezzanine.

"Spell-coupling! Abbott, it must be. But with what?"

Indeed, that seemed most likely. When spells and counter-spells are both fluxing in the same space-time nexus, sometimes most peculiar events occur.

I saw Roger industriously applying a napkin to Penny's feet while she shook out her shoes away from him. "You know, Armand, Winslow crashed almost simultaneously with Roger's entrance. Do you suppose your amulet could — "

Armand said something which I would have thought quite rude if he had been sober and slapped the side of his head. "Of course! But I *thought* I was careful."

He ran to Roger, who quickly whipped off his tie and then the medallion while I sloshed down into the living room. Armand counter-spelled the amulet and then joined me in unbinding the cornucopia spells from the punch bowls.

Just as I finished, someone at an upper floor window shouted, "The flood is threatening the houses at the foot of the hill!"

The Dean's front door was open; and through this constriction, the wine was flowing as rough and frothy as the worst river rapids. When I went to the door to look, the current knocked my legs out from under me and I flowed out with the tide of red, sparkling champagne.

Alas for temperance! For (quite involuntarily, of course) I swallowed a couple of mouthfuls of the sweet stuff — actually, it *was* rather good — before I regained my balance. Mrs. Gray's house at the bottom of the slope, where Roger boarded, was indeed already surrounded by a dark, foaming sea.

Roger had sloshed and slid down the stairs at the first cry after telling Penny to stay put. She of course had followed him anyway until he had given in and dragged her along by the hand. When he had a clear view of the houses below, he stopped abruptly.

"Mrs. Gray. All her figurines and stuffed animals and wallpaper. Everything she has left is in — come on, Abbott!"

I splashed down the hill after him, several times falling into the foam. The bubbles tickled my nose and I began to sneeze uncontrollably, but I finally remembered the moon.

"Wait! Let Armand and me handle it!"

But he went on anyway, and in a moment, brilliant, jagged stairs of lightning — a spell I had taught him — began to arc down from the sky. Faster and faster they came until the sky was filled with what seemed one continuous flash of fire, and the thunder boomed and boomed like the guns of Armageddon. Clouds of condensing wine and of blue ozone blew past me, and my teeth began to chatter as the wet and the cold night air chilled me to the marrow. But I began the spell for seepage and ground water to drain the wine into the water table even as I realized that Roger was using the wrath of the sky to carve a run-off channel through the little mound of soil to the east.

When I had finished and could feel the wine level falling, it took a few seconds before I could see clearly again after the dazzle of the lightning. To my horror, I saw my shadow; the moon had emerged from the clouds. And then I saw Roger and received a second shock: although a couple of seams had split, his clothes were still more or less intact and he was still in human form.

A rainbow hid the face of the moon, just enough: a magical rainbow of that species much favored by the great mages of the Renaissance. And thus the moonbeams were robbed of their powers of enchantment.

Penny was standing in front of him, barefoot and wet up to the waist, a small, bedraggled figure looking very vulnerable. "I'm sorry, Roger. I couldn't stand to see you embarrassed."

He bent down and hugged her, even more wet and bedraggled and at least a foot taller.

When Armand finally dragged himself down the hill a couple of minutes later, Penny and Roger were still embracing, talking rapidly in soft, low voices. Armand looked at them and sighed. "Apologies, explanations, and planning the rest of their lives. Some people never learn."

"I hope not, Armand."

He looked at me and broke into a sheepish grin. "I hope not, too, but that's just between you and me. We bachelors have reputations to protect."

I threw an arm around his shoulder and steered him towards the porch where Mrs. Gray was already beckoning with blankets.

"But how, Abbott, will we ever explain this to the Dean?"

The wedding of Penny and Roger was quiet and mostly family, but I still thought it was worth three of the ordinary kind. Afterwards, I

thanked them for inviting Armand and me.

"Eventually, you would have married anyway."

Roger nodded and smiled. "Eventually. But we both owe you more than we can say."

How silly! Of course our adventure only hastened the inevitable. But they are a most affectionate couple, and I hope they have as many little sillies as they please.

Dean Tedric and Gregor Arimisian, alas, are not too pleased with Armand and me. Fortunately, we both have tenure; and the Dean and Gregor will doubtless find the whole incident quite hilarious in another decade or so.

Later, we conducted a thorough experiment in Armand's laboratory, and the wine behaved itself quite decently.

"I told you I was careful, Abbott."

Poor Armand. No man is more vulnerable than in his professional vanity, but at least now he was vindicated. Evidently, the jolly winemakers had happily enjoyed their concoction — while they were still binding the spells.

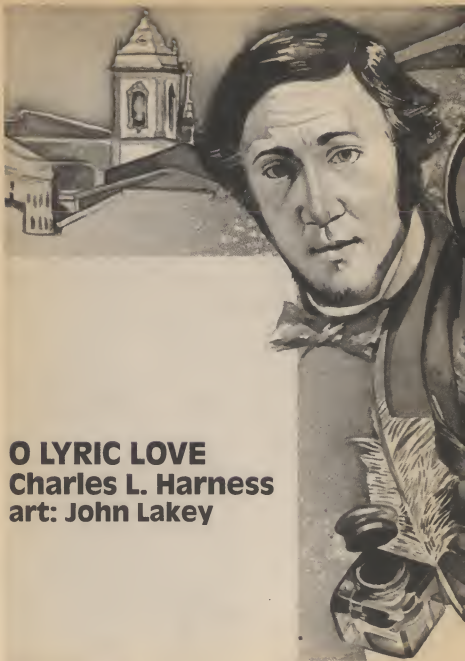
"But there goes my note in *Alchemy Letters*," he grumbled as I left. Well, yes, he could hardly publish with the footnote that the spell was safe except against tipsy deans and inebriated senior professors.

I could have reminded him that "publish-or-perish" is a way of life only for assistant professors. But I saved my breath, for the diabolical cleverness of these deans is that once a young faculty member has worked very hard for six years, he acquires a certain set of mind that keeps most of us up to the mark for a lifetime.

Still, what really matters is that Roger and Penny have acquired a certain set of the heart of their own, and that, too, will last.

Magically yours,  
Abbott Longsword





**O LYRIC LOVE**  
**Charles L. Harness**  
**art: John Lakey**



*Charles L. Harness published many distinguished stories in the 1940s and early '50s, most notably two now-classic novels, The Paradox Men and The Rose. In another burst of creativity in the mid-1960s, he produced The Ring of Ritornel and several noteworthy novelets, including the Nebula-finalist, "An Ornament to His Profession," which draws on his experience as a lawyer.*

*More recently, he has turned out a steady stream of novels, including Wolfhead, The Catalyst, The Venetian Court, and several others. The present story is his first appearance in Amazing® since 1974.*

I had long ago realized that Professor Mae Leslie identified strongly with the Victorian poet Elizabeth Barrett. She looked like Barrett and dressed like Barrett. Like Barrett's, her hair dangled in long ringlets about a pale but lively face. Like the poet, she wore no make-up. She out-Barretted Barrett in one respect: an adolescent maltreated bout with polio confined her to a wheelchair, which she maneuvered with great skill and energy. As we know, the British poet had a spinal problem and was in bed a lot, but she was certainly ambulatory on her wedding day. Which brings me to the next similarity: both women (in their own way, and in their own time) loved Robert Browning.

And I loved Mae Leslie. How do I love thee? Let me count the ways! First as a beautiful woman. Consider the stark black hair, artfully contrived into those curls. The flashing green eyes. The naturally red lips between the translucent cheeks. That body. I imagined marvelous breasts, smooth, semi-firm, capped by roseate buds. Then the erotic sweep of belly. Her hands were sonnets. And yet she was virginal. I doubted that any male hand had ever been laid on her in lust. What a waste!

For years I had gone to sleep thinking of her. She was older than I — by six or seven years. It didn't matter to me. Her erudition was formidable, but that didn't matter either. Recognized authority on minor Victorian poets. She had written books. She lectured by video terminal all over the world: Oxford, the Sorbonne, Moscow U., and (would you believe it!) M.I.T.

She knew something about everything. The universal doctor. She could even hold her own when we discussed my undergraduate specialty, which was quantum physics, and how certain theoretical sub-particles could move forward and backward along a time axis (the "Feynman minuet"). She appreciated me. She encouraged me. As my senior year in college closed, she helped me get the graduate scholarship.

Aye, there's the rub.

So here we were in her little office in the Fine Arts Building, once again after all these years, and I knew exactly what she was thinking.

The Browning paper.

I had relived that last conference five years ago a dozen times. She had been quite disturbed, and she kept fiddling with the controls on her wheelchair. "You need an A in this course if you are going to get that scholarship in quantum physics. Are you making any progress with your paper on Browning?"

How much was any? "Some," I said. Where had the time gone? Time time time. I had six end-of-term assignments and projects. Too much time on the time project. And now Browning was left. An Appreciation of Robert Browning. Term paper for Eng Lit 205. How could it have happened? I loved this lovely stricken woman. I knew it hurt her to deny me that A and the scholarship. Well, it hurt me too. I was hurting all over. For me, for her, for my future.

"What are you doing this summer?" she had asked.

I had shrugged. "Nothing."

She brightened. "I'll give you an A. Now. You'll get the scholarship. Finish the paper this summer. Let me have it by the end of August. Promise?"

"Of course!" I had been surprised and grateful. I had stretched out my hand, as though to shake on the deal, and probably by simple reflex she had given me hers. But then I had taken that hand in both of mine, and I had laid the fingers out flat, and I had kissed the palm, and given it back to her, and left, picking my way through the stacks of books and papers.

Five years ago.

The Browning paper.

I had tried. For the next two weeks of that summer I had kept the library terminals hot, collecting data, getting microprintouts. I had even drafted a couple of preliminary pages. Who the hell was this guy Robert Browning? The husband of Elizabeth Barrett: that was his only claim to fame. In fact, a lot of the computer entries called him Robert Barrett.

"He wrote beautiful things, significant things," Mae had insisted (arguing so futilely at the cold bar of history). "That's how they met, in the first place. She was already a great poet, and she understood *his* poetry: 'My Last Duchess.' ('She liked whate'er she looked on, and her looks went everywhere.') 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.' ('I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three.') 'Home Thoughts from Abroad.' ('Oh to be in England, now that April's there.') 'Pippa Passes.' ('God's in his heaven — All's right with the world.') And of course that remarkable little thing, 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin.' All before he met Elizabeth Barrett."

I looked it all up. Robert declared his love. At first Elizabeth rejected him. My father will never consent, she said. Besides, I am a semi-invalid. I would be a burden to you. Consent be damned! declared Robert. Arise! She did. And so they were married, and moved to Italy, and she continued her career with the greatest love poems of the nineteenth century: *Sonnets from the*

Portuguese. And all the other marvels: *Aurora Leigh*, *A Musical Instrument*, *De Profundis*, *Bianca Among the Nightingales*. But Robert just faded away. He wrote and was ignored. She wrote and flourished.

At one of our early conferences Mae had posed an interesting speculation. "If Robert had written one really significant long poem, it might have been enough to ignite well-deserved interest in his earlier works. He might have got an entry in *Poets' Dictionary*, and perhaps a half column in the *Encyclopedia of English Poets*. But no. 'The Pied Piper' has survived, and that's all."

So now it was five years later, and I had brought Dr. Mae Leslie, plus wheelchair, in my van to my laboratory. She hadn't wanted to leave her campus cubbyhole at first. She was still mad at me. She still felt betrayed. Because to this very day I hadn't finished my Appreciation of Robert Browning. As it turned out, I had had to drop my Browning research in the middle of that first summer and get a job, or starve. That fateful August had passed, and no paper. But I had got the A, and then the scholarship. We hadn't spoken since, except for my call to her yesterday.

I got her out of the van and onto the sidewalk. She checked the controls on her wheelchair. "Lead on. I'm right behind you."

And so on into the entrance way, past the offices ("Hold my calls." "Yes, Mr. Roland."), and into the back of the main building.

She was impressed. "Is all this your lab?"

"This is it. We make things here, such as electronic gadgets for NASA, and we have several classified government research projects. All this exists because you gave me an A in Eng Lit 205."

"Which you did not earn. You still owe me a Robert Browning."

"I'm coming to that." We stood before a locked door, which I opened with a signal from a pen-light. We stepped inside. "The transmission room."

"What in the world?"

I could understand her wonder. It didn't look like much. Just a big room, nearly empty. It held a couple of tables, a computer console, and a chair or two. A few books and some apparatus lay on one of the tables, which also carried a switch panel. Soft shadowless radiants provided anonymous illumination.

I looked at my watch. I had timed well. If it worked. And I knew it would. "Look at the table," I told her. "A book will appear on the dais in the center." As we watched a paperback volume did in fact materialize on the raised area.

I heard her sharp intake of breath. "How did you do that?"

"It wasn't easy." I walked over and picked the book up. "It's the undergraduate catalog." I peeked into the Eng Lit section. I hesitated very briefly as a truly astonishing entry struck my eye. Then I closed it up quickly and handed it to her. "Care to check?" She flipped the pages at random, then looked up. "So what's the point?"



"Just a little preliminary test demonstration." I picked up another volume from the table. "*This* is the identical catalog. At three P.M., one hour from now, as we leave, I shall put it here on the dais — we call it the Feynman plate — and it will be sent into the past, which is of course here and now, at two P.M. It materializes — *has* materialized — on the table. In a word, it time-travels."

She just looked at me. I couldn't tell whether she believed me or not. She said noncommittally: "Go on."

"The plate is capable of transmitting up to one kilo of matter, backward in time, up to two hundred years, and to anywhere in the world."

She had to think about that. She temporized. "I suppose it's silly of me to ask if this has something to do with Robert Browning." It wasn't really a question. It was almost as though she was thinking out loud.

"We're going to send him something." I watched her face. She was not completely successful in masking her thoughts, which said, *you are crazy*.

She asked politely, as though we were assembling a seminar agenda, "Just exactly what are you going to send him? The college catalog?"

"No." I took the catalog from her and handed her a second book. "This." She put it in her lap and opened the stiff vellum-veneered cover. Her eyes widened. "Well now, what have we here? Title page — handwritten. And in Italian! Concerning the trial of Count Guido Franceschini and four confederates for murder, and their conviction and execution." Very carefully she turned a few more pages. "Now we get into printed Latin. Paper old, very old, edges crumbling. Depositions . . . dated . . . good heavens! . . . 1698!" She peered up at me a moment, intrigued, puzzled, then continued leafing through the book. "And finally, more handwritten pages." She closed the volume cautiously. "Bernard, what is it? What is this all about?"

"*That*," I said, "is the keystone in our campaign to rehabilitate your friend Robert Browning. The people really lived. The godawful things reported there really happened. May I tell you the story?"

"Please do."

"Well, there was this Guido Franceschini, a bachelor, and a sort of second-class Italian nobleman, and he was broke, and looking for a bride with money. A middle-aged bourgeois couple by the name of Camparini had a young and beautiful daughter, Pompilia, and the parents had a big block of treasury bonds. The bond income was to continue for the life of their children — which meant during Pompilia's life. The Camparinis wanted the prestige of being in-laws to nobility. Besides which, Guido claimed to be rich in his own right. And so the marriage was duly arranged and the income assigned over to Guido. Then came trouble. Mama and Papa Camparini visited the newlyweds at the gloomy Franceschini castle in Arezzo, near Rome, and there their eyes were opened. The Franceschinis were at the bottom of the list of petty nobility; except for the bond income they were paupers; and they insulted the Camparinis at every turn. Mama and Papa

returned to Rome, furious, and vowing vengeance. They filed a suit in the Roman court, asking that the bond income be revoked, on the ground that Pompilia was not their daughter. Actually, they had bought her as a newborn infant from a woman of the streets and passed her off as their own child to extend the period of bond income. And now it was Guido Franceschini's turn to be furious. He threatened to kill Pompilia. Terrified, she escaped from Arezzo with the help of a priest, Giuseppi Caponsacchi. Guido rode off in pursuit, and overtook them at an inn. Adultery! he howled. A big row. Police called in. A clerical court considered the case. Pompilia was finally released to the custody of her parents, in Rome. Caponsacchi was exiled to Civita for three years. Count Guido was told to go home. And so he did. But he couldn't leave it alone. He gathered up four local cutthroats, rode to Rome, burst in on the Camparinis — father, mother, daughter — and killed the three of them. The five were caught, tried, and executed. Guido was beheaded, to give credit to his claim to nobility. The other four were hanged. All as reported in this old yellow book. You note here the depositions of the witnesses, the statement of the prosecutor, the pleas of defense counsel, judgment of the court, Guido's appeal to the Pope, and the three-line affirmation of His Holiness."

"Impressive." She was still noncommittal.

"There's just one little difficulty."

"Oh?"

"It's all forgery. Every page. Every word."

She opened the book at random and studied the pages again. Then she shook her head. "Forgery? I've seen old documents before. It certainly *looks* genuine."

I smiled. It was good to hear her say that. "The paper was made last month from a mix of rags, old paper, fish nets, and flax, pulped by hand in mortar and pestle, tub-sized with alum, then hand-laid. An old Italian recipe. The type was very recently reconstructed from a Manutius font characteristic of the period. The Latin and Italian texts were prepared by scholars at Columbia and Fordham. After binding in vellum, the whole was aged by exposure to u.v. light and steam. The finished product was delivered to me yesterday. Whereupon I promptly called you."

"And you're going to send it back in time to Robert Browning?"

"Yes."

"How can you be so sure he'll get it? And what is he supposed to do with it?"

"There's a lot more. Let me give you the whole picture."

"I'd like that."

"To start, take note that my Barrett-Browning data bank includes everything known today about either or both of the poets. I've pieced together comprehensive personality profiles from old letters — theirs and others; their literary output; reviews; biographical sketches of Elizabeth (Robert

had none); maps of places and cities where they lived or visited; her surviving medical files; histories of the times; and so on. Where data are missing, I have asked the computer to give its best estimate. We can fairly predict what each of them would do or say under certain given circumstances. In this way, we can determine that on the morning of June 15, 1860, a Friday, Robert will be out for a walk in downtown Florence, Italy. The weather is clear and hot. He is timing his outing so as to be home and have a late lunch with Elizabeth. She has not been feeling well, and he wants to spend the afternoon with her. His return route lies through the square of San Lorenzo. There's a cart in the middle of the square loaded helter-skelter with pots and pans, old clothes, books, all kinds of junk. On this hot midday, this old yellow book will land on top of the heap. Browning will see it and buy it. The computer now predicts his actions, right down to the trifling sum, one lira, that he will offer for the book. (He is a man of careful economies!) My forgery will fascinate him. He'll read it as he walks home. He'll pass the Strozzi palace, cross the Arno on the San Trinita bridge; he walks down the Via Maggio; and by the time he reaches home at Casa Guidi, he'll have finished it. In his head is crystallizing the dramatic background for a magnificent work, the thing that will eventually transform the husband of Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning, major Victorian poet, and rival of Tennyson, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley . . ." I paused.

She was still not convinced. "If you can really do this kind of thing . . . send matter back through time, why haven't you sent a bomb back to Hitler's bedroom, say about 1935?"

I shrugged. "I thought of that. But I'm afraid to change history so drastically. With no Hitler, would we have the modern state of Israel? And suppose I altered the past in such a way that my parents never met? No. We've got to limit the transmission to non-historic matters."

"Suppose Browning checks up on your alleged facts?"

"I'm sure he will. And he'll find the story is completely true. My material is based on data in a volume in the Royal Casanatense Library in Rome, identified as Miscellaneous Ms. 2037, '*Varii successi curiosi e degni di esser considerati*.' And there are unrelated supporting reports, such as the baptismal records of the child-wife Pompilia, of the hero priest Caponsacchi, of the villainous husband Franceschini, and so on. I have photocopies. Do you want to see them?"

"Never mind." She kept looking at me, puzzled, thoughtful. "Assume it works. Assume Browning is stimulated to write his magnum opus, his masterpiece, and it makes him famous. I keep coming back to my basic question. Why are you doing this, Bernard?"

"I owe you. With interest."

"Not this much."

"Yes, this much. This is my term paper, An Appreciation of Robert Browning. I have the facilities, the money, the technology. I can do it,

finally. Permit me to pay my debt.”

Debt? Ha! There was more to it than that. I had a secondary object, like a wheel within a wheel, or, as the computermen say, a nested loop. And it was this: I wanted Robert Browning to compose some lines for me that would show my love for Mae Leslie. I would call on him to declare, in exquisite rhyme or blank verse or whatever, feelings I did not know how to express. I would go to him as an illiterate peasant in the streets of Calcutta or Quito or Morocco goes to a commercial letter writer, to compose a dulcet message to a beloved. I was like the dull and inarticulate De Neuville, persuading Cyrano de Bergerac to compose love letters to Roxane. Robert, old friend, say this to her, that she is like a song, a lyric. She is part angel, part bird. And tell her, O age-lost ghost writer, that I have a wild and wonderful hunger for her.

Was this possible? I doubted it. But it was worth a try.

Mae broke in on my reverie. “Well then, let’s see where it stands. Browning buys the book, reads it, is impressed. He visualizes a great poetic drama. What then? Does he start drafting right away?”

“I think not. It has to simmer a bit. He has to sort out the players, define their roles. He will be Caponsacchi. Edward Barrett, Elizabeth’s father, will be the tyrannical Guido Franceschini. The pure and innocent Pompilia will be Elizabeth. We bear in mind that Elizabeth has barely a year to live. She dies in June, 1861. Browning will see this much clearer following her death.”

Mae sat there in her chair, silent, probably inwardly grieving at my insanity.

“There’s a terminal with a CRT just behind you,” I said. “Before we send the old yellow book down the time tube, you might want to see what one of the standard references has to say, as of this day and this hour, about friend Robert.”

“I know already. Well, okay, for the record . . .” She revolved toward the terminal and tapped away at the keyboard. “I’m accessing *Encyclopedia of English Poets*. Ah, here we are. It says ‘Browning, Robert. See Barrett, Elizabeth.’ Satisfied? Or shall I go for her?”

“No. Just print the entry. When we finish, we can call him up again and compare. Before and after, as it were. I think we’re about ready. Shall I pull the switch?”

But she temporized. I could sense a growing unease, as though finally she was thinking, maybe he’s right . . . maybe it really will work. But . . . but . . . “Bernard, have you ever done this . . . transmitted matter . . . before?”

“You saw the college catalog, and there were several times before that.” (Paper clips, a pencil, a coin, traveling at farthest from one end of the table to the other, over a time span of a few hours.)

“So it’s perfectly safe?”

“Well . . .” (Now it was my turn to hesitate. I knew a tremendous surge of

energy would be required to send a full kilo back nearly two hundred years, and across nearly five thousand miles. I had never transmitted on this scale before.) I said, "There may be certain holographic hallucinations, but there is nothing physically harmful." (I hope.)

She sighed. (Had she noted the edge of uncertainty in my assurance?) "Go ahead." She rolled away from the console.

I laid the forgery on the Feynman plate. "Mae," I said, "nothing is going to happen to us, but just in case . . . I want you to know that I love you." I pulled the switch.

"Bernard!"

The room began to vibrate. She shrieked. There was a tremendous crash and a blinding light. We threw our arms up over our eyes. It wasn't supposed to do this. Had a time-tesseract collapsed somewhere? My head was going around crazily. Mae . . . I had to reach Mae. . . .

Things steadied. I stood up and looked about in the semi-dark.

Mae? No Mae. No tables. No computers . . . no lab . . .

I am standing on a sort of terrace-balcony. Somewhere, somewhen. I lean on the railing while I wait for my head to stop spinning. A gibbous moon lights up an eerie scene outside. Across the street, a church dome. San Felice. I hear the muted chant of nuns drifting out of the square windows. People with lanterns and torches moving in the street. A fiesta. I tug at my beard. Some time ago, as a whim, when it was black, I shaved it off. When it grew out again it was gray. 'Distinguished!' Elizabeth said.

I love this view. We're fortunate to live here at Casa Guidi, the townhouse of faded Florentine nobility. Thirteen years. Living, writing, loving. The reviewers were ecstatic over *Aurora Leigh*. And she's hard at work on "Bianca."

Night and people. Everything brings me back to the medicinal leaves of that strange yellow book. I see the people so clearly. Pompilia fleeing for her life. I mark her route from Arezzo. Perugia . . . Camoscia . . . Chiusi . . . Foligno . . . Castelnuovo . . . ah, now she is exhausted, and Caponsacchi insists they stop and rest. A grave mistake. Only four hours from Rome. Couldn't they have made it? I think the inn still stands at Castelnuovo. And there Guido overtakes them. And then one thing led to another . . . and finally to that final frightful night. She had twenty-two stab wounds. Or was it the father? Check that.

I walked slowly back into the bedroom. Mae lay on the divan, sleeping quietly with the thin blue coverlet rumped around her legs. Dim-lit by moonlight. No, not Mae. Elizabeth. Though the ringlets make the faces almost identical. How had Hawthorne described her? 'A pale small person, scarcely embodied at all . . . elfin, rather than earthly . . . sweetly disposed towards the human race, though only remotely akin to it.' What an astonishing person you are, Elizabeth. My angel. My bird uncaged, singing your sweet lyrics. My love.

I listened to the silences within the house. Son Pen, asleep in his little room. Wilson's night off. She's out somewhere with her young man.

My head begins to whirl again. I am moving forward in time. Months are flitting by like uncertain moths. We are still in Casa Guidi, and it is still night, and the noises within the cavernous rooms are still faint, a dark gentle background to the tragedy unfolding in the bedroom.

I hear Mae's guttural whisper. "Robert . . ." I hurry back in. Last night she told Pen she felt better. But I don't know. I sit in bed with her and she snuggles up across my chest. My hand rests over her heart. The beat is faint and irregular.

Is she conscious? Does she know where she is? I say softly, "Do you know me?" "Oh Robert, I love you, I love you." She kisses me. She says, "I must tell you something." "Yes?" She whispers, "Our lives are held by God." She puts her arms around me happily. She says, "God bless you." It is incredible. I say, "Are you comfortable?" "Beautiful."

She smiles. Her head falls forward. At first I think she may have fallen asleep. At worst, fainted. Anything else, unacceptable. But I know. She is dead. It is four in the morning, June 29, 1861. Tears define nothing. A time for auguries and comets.

The mists slowly cleared.

Mae was no longer in my arms. (Was she ever?) She was in her wheelchair, and we were back in my lab, and staring at each other.

She spoke first. "I thought I was . . . you were . . ."

"Illusions," I said. "I mentioned the possibility."

"Illusions . . . God! At the last, there, I thought I had died." Her voice faded away and she passed translucent fingers over her brow. Her face was wet, and her long curls clung plastered to her cheeks. I passed a roll of paper towels to her, and she daubed at her face and hair. "Now what?" she asked. "Besides wrecking my hair-do and scaring me out of my wits, what have you accomplished? Everything around here seems the same."

First things first. "How do you feel?"

"All right. Just a little shaky. I need to think."

I could appreciate that. So did I.

Her thinking was not hard to follow. I had had the same thoughts many times. Consider the various possibilities. First — the project hadn't worked. Because if it had, Robert Browning would today be a famous poet, and we would know it. But we don't know it, so he isn't, so it didn't work. Second — but if perchance somehow it *had* worked, there must now be two parallel worlds, one with and one without the great forgery; one world in which Browning is a great poet, and one world in which he's a virtual non-entity, known only as Elizabeth's husband. Two such worlds would reconcile all the facts. (But if there are two, may there not be three . . . or four . . . or a million? Where does it stop?)

Too much of this could drive her crazy. And me too. I had to break it up. I

said, "Have you recovered enough to work with the terminal again?"

She blinked. "Oh . . . the terminal. I think so." She rubbed her fingers together, then rolled back to the console. "For a strict comparison let's check the *Encyclopedia of English Poets* once more."

"Good idea."

She tapped the keys. The CRT sprang to life. "Good God!" she muttered. "Look at that!" The screen filled up. Then line after line, it overflowed. This went on for several minutes. "All about Robert Browning."

"Get a print-out," I said.

The laser printer began to hum. I walked over to the collection basket and, as the sheets folded and dropped, I dug under the pile for the very bottommost, the original encyclopedia entry. Was it still there? Was there any place in this new parallel world for a reference identifying Robert as simply the husband of Elizabeth Barrett? Aha! There it was! "Browning, Robert. See Barrett, Elizabeth." I put it back out of sight and faced her. "What did he call it?"

"Call what? Oh, the new magnum opus." Her eyes became suddenly sly. She was getting into the spirit. "Not so fast. What did your computer *predict* he would call it?"

"*The Ring and the Book*."

"Quite plausible. The ring would be from the inscription the Florentines made for Elizabeth on the wall of Casa Guidi: ' . . . she made of her verses a golden ring between Italy and England.' The book would be your famous forgery. And of course, the initials of the title would probably be R for Robert and B for Browning. Well, let's check. What *did* he call it? And there it is: *The Ring and the Book*. Bullseye! Twenty-one thousand lines. First published by Smith and Elder in four volumes, at monthly intervals, starting 21 November 1868."

I said, "Look for some contemporary reviews."

"Coming up." (She was with it now, a believer. How could she ever have doubted?) "*Fortnightly Review*, *London Quarterly*, *Revue des Deux Mondes* — all unstinting praise. Ah, listen to what the *Edinburgh Review* says about Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and the Pope: 'In English literature the creative faculty of the poet has not produced three characters more beautiful or better to contemplate than these three.' And the *Athenaeum*, the lordly arbiter of English criticism, says, ' . . . *The Ring and the Book* is beyond all parallel the supremest poetical achievement of our time . . . it is the most precious and profound spiritual treasure that England has produced since the days of Shakespeare.' " She looked up at me in wonder and silence. Finally, she turned back to the computer. "And now, how do we stand with Elizabeth Barrett?"

"Don't, Mae."

"I've got to know." She typed briefly at the keyboard. "Look at *that*. It says, see Elizabeth Barrett Browning."

I didn't know what to say. Keeping quiet just now was one of the few smart things I've done in my life.

"It was a risk we ran," she said thoughtfully. "They were one entity, really. The more of her, the less of him. And vice versa. Each wanted the other to be appreciated and understood and famous. This was her wish for him, and his for her. She would have wanted it this way. Hm. *The Ring and the Book*. I want to read this great thing."

I said, "The computer predicted he would dedicate it to her. For now, why don't we just look for the dedication? Plug in the poem. The dedication ought to be somewhere near the beginning."

"All right. Here we go.

## PART 1

*Do you see this ring?*

[I'm skimming," said Mae.]

*"Do you see this square old yellow book?*

[And on, and on. Robert takes his time. Makes it all clear. Ah, here we are, these lines to Elizabeth, closing Part 1:]

*O lyric love, half angel and half bird,  
And all a wonder and a wild desire —"*

Her voice broke. "I can't. It's too personal. She had been dead several years when he wrote that. All for her. He remembered . . . everything. He opened his heart. Oh Bernard, what have we done?"

Well, Robert, I thought, you got my message, loud and clear. And you magically transformed it. But it was *my* message, to *Mae*, and now was the time to tell her. I wanted to say, Mae darling, that dedication was my declaration to you. But I couldn't speak. Mae saw it as a love letter to Elizabeth. And of course the lines were no longer just for Elizabeth: they had now entered the public domain and were the sacred property of every woman who was ever loved, or ever would be. So be it.

I tried to reassure her. "We did exactly what they both wanted. And the world is better for it."

"Do you think so? Well . . ." She shrugged. (Was she still bothered about Elizabeth, fading into the background?) She studied the CRT. "He didn't stop with the *Ring*. A lot of later things. Everything works now, everything sells. Browning clubs at Oxford and Cambridge. They explain *Sordello* to the mystified. Swinburne is elated with 'Fifine at the Fair': '. . . far better than anything Browning has yet written.' The Browning Society of London is chartered in 1881. Oxford and Cambridge give him honorary degrees."

I broke in. "Anything about what finally happened to the old yellow book?"

"Hold on. Here we are. After his death his son donated it to the library of



Balliol College, at Oxford."

"What do you have on his death?"

"He died while visiting Venice, 12 December 1889. He had wanted to be buried next to Elizabeth, in the Protestant Cemetery at Florence, but because of Italian regulations and red tape, this was not possible. So he was buried in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, next to Tennyson, and facing Chaucer." She paused. There was not much more to say. "I guess that's the end of it. Somehow, I'll have to catch up with Robert. Read the *Ring*, of course, and all his later poems. Study his bio. And the critics, contemporary and modern. He seems to have aged well."

"I know a good start," I said. "It's right here in the catalog."

"Really?"

The game was not over. An hour ago I had noted a fascinating entry in the time-traveled college catalog. Eros had one more shaft in his quiver. I said, "Remember, in our new parallel world, our little catalog reflects all changes resulting from Robert's rehabilitation. Ah, here. Eng 301, Travel Seminar, Summer Session. An appreciation of Elizabeth Browning, minor Victorian poetess, wife of Robert Browning. Visit scenes of her childhood, youth, and marriage: Hope End, Wimpole Street. The marriage flight. Then that week in Paris. Next, Pisa, and finally Casa Guidi in Florence."

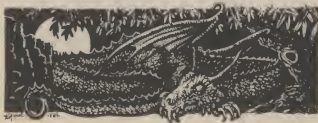
"Curious. Who's the tour instructor?"

"You are."

"No!" She grabbed the catalog, read slowly aloud, while she turned white. "I *can't*. I'm a semi-invalid."

"So was Elizabeth. I'll go with you. I'll help you up and down all those stairs. I'll take the questions about Robert. Where did they stay in Paris? The Hôtel de Ville, in the Rue D'Evêque, both now long gone." I may have regarded her with a look more leer than lyric (this being the nature of a man of purpose). "Do you know what they did on their last night there?"

She studied me with an innocence suggestive of Pompilia Franceschini, but with just a touch of Mata Hari and Lucrezia Borgia (such being the nature of a woman of purpose). "I know that it's exactly one minute before three o'clock, and that if you don't put that catalog on your funny time-plate, we may both wind up in a world where none of this ever happened."





**THE CAMBRIAN EXPLOSION**  
by Stephen L. Gillett, Ph. D.  
art: Jim Bearcloud



*As you read, try to imagine the author with a beer in one hand and a geology pick in the other, gesturing at the outcrop. He has done extensive field work in the southern Great Basin, where "field" often means straight up and down. He is a corresponding member of International Geological Correlation Project 29, concerned with the Cambrian.*

All of a sudden the Cambrian seas abounded with them: mollusks, brachiopods, echinoderms (the phylum that includes present-day starfish and sand dollars), and a host of others. In fact, the rocks of the early Cambrian hold fossils representing every modern phylum but the Chordata, to which vertebrates like ourselves belong.

The Cambrian period, then, marked the beginning of the Paleozoic era, the oldest geologic era that contains abundant shelly fossils of metazoans (multicelled living things). Its most typical fossils are the trilobites, a class of the arthropods; lobsters and crabs are their distant cousins. Although the trilobites did not die out completely until the close of the Paleozoic, they were never again as abundant or diverse as they were in the Cambrian.

And everything before the Cambrian was the Precambrian, in the latter part of which there must have been life ancestral to all these living things, so diverse, so highly evolved. The contrast became more dramatic when we found out that the Cambrian began less than 600 million years ago, while the Earth itself is about 4.6 billion years old. With respect to metazoans, a vast part of the Earth's history is rather like the Bellman's map. Why should they appear all at once?

Indeed, the Cambrian explosion (as this bursting forth of life has been known) is so sudden that it has inspired quite a number of glamorous, even sensational, theories. Some of these explanations have gotten ossified in the popular literature, and you can read them presented as accepted fact.

Maybe the Moon was captured in the late Precambrian, and as it hurled around in a much closer orbit than today's, the continents were scoured down by huge tides. The intense scouring obliterated any geologic record of earlier metazoans. (This idea has been graphically and poetically described by Isaac Asimov in his essay "The Great Borning".) Alternatively, maybe there were profound geochemical changes: either the Precambrian ocean was too acid for calcareous skeletons, because of a supposed high pressure of carbon dioxide, or it was too alkaline, because of an equally hypothetical abundance of ammonia. Or else maybe it contained too little calcium, or too much magnesium.

Perhaps the Cambrian explosion reflects atmospheric oxygen reaching 1% of atmospheric pressure, the Pasteur Point; presumably complex life forms weren't possible before this. Or, yet again, maybe the ozone layer didn't form until the Cambrian. Or finally, there's evidence of an ice age, or

more likely several ice ages, not too long (geologically speaking!) before the Cambrian. Maybe an ice age had something to do with the Cambrian explosion.

One thing these ideas all have in common is that "Things were different in the Precambrian." Some drastic change in the environment is invoked as explanation for the Cambrian explosion (although, as you can see, it's not agreed *which* things might have been different).

Another thing all these ideas have in common is that there's not a shred of evidence for them in the geologic record. Most are demonstrably wrong, and *all* are probably wrong.

The Cambrian Explosion is indeed sudden, as geologic events go, but the suddenness has been exaggerated a bit. From the popular literature, you may well have gotten the idea that all the different types of hard-shelled metazoans, from trilobites to mollusks to echinoderms, show up together all at once. Further, you also might suppose that the sedimentary rocks in which these fossils occur always lie immediately on top of ancient, deeply eroded rocks. You might even think that Precambrian sedimentary rocks don't even exist; that everything older than Cambrian has been melted or metamorphosed, uplifted, and deeply eroded off again before Cambrian sediments were deposited.

These are understandable impressions, because indeed geologists in the 19th and early 20th centuries thought that the latest Precambrian sedimentary rocks had been eroded away, and that the record of early metazoan evolution had vanished with it. This hypothetical missing link of geologic time was called the Lipalian (Lye-PAY-lee-uhn) interval.

But is there *really* a missing record? Come with me on a mental geologic tour. We'll take a geologic traverse starting from the Grand Canyon, which displays a classic and well-studied cross-section of Paleozoic strata, and follow the Cambrian rocks westward where they gradually change into a vastly thicker sequence of strata.

In much of the Canyon where it's deep enough to see the Cambrian rocks, you see the oldest Cambrian formation, the Tapeats (tuh-PEETS) Sandstone, resting with a profound discontinuity on ancient, gnarled metamorphic and igneous rocks. This discontinuity, or unconformity, as geologists term it, represents an enormous interval of time and an enormous amount of erosion. Rocks like those below the unconformity were formed kilometers deep in the crust under extreme heat and pressure. Their age, determined by measuring the amount of daughter products from the decay of natural radioactive elements, is around 1700 million years. The beginning, or base, as geologists say, of the Cambrian is somewhat less than 600 million years old. Thus, that unconformity represents over a billion years, substantially more time than has elapsed since the base of the Cambrian itself.

So far, this sounds like the Lipalian interval, right? And indeed, outcrops like this suggested a Lipalian interval in the first place. But let's look closer.

We'll find that it's not really that way at all.

First, even this profound unconformity is not really planar, no more so than lots of flattish areas on the present day Earth. Here and there, bodies of more resistant rock, commonly granite, in this ancient complex stuck up as islands in the Cambrian sea. (You can tell this because the Tapeats becomes thinner next to these ancient islands; the low areas were filled in first. In some cases, the sandstone is completely absent over the tops of these paleohills. Such islands were high enough that they weren't covered completely until the next younger Cambrian strata, the Bright Angel Shale, were laid down.)

Second, parts of a extremely thick sequence of late Precambrian sedimentary rocks are preserved elsewhere in the Grand Canyon, and these rocks fill much of that gap between 1700 million years and earliest Cambrian time. These rocks don't occur everywhere because they were tilted before the Cambrian, and the tilted blocks were eroded almost flat before the Tapeats Sandstone was laid down. Here again, though, the leveling wasn't perfect. Islands made of Shinumo Quartzite, an erosion-resistant rock in this late Precambrian sequence, also emerged in the early Cambrian sea.

And even though these Precambrian sedimentary rocks are extremely old, they haven't been metamorphosed. They look as fresh as many strata much younger. Except for the absence of metazoan fossils, they look like Paleozoic rocks!

Thus, a lot happened in the billion years between the ancient metamorphic rocks and the base of the Cambrian. The metamorphic rocks were first uplifted and eroded off long before the Cambrian, probably within a hundred million years of being formed. Then the younger Precambrian sedimentary rocks were deposited on top of this erosional surface. Then, everything was tilted and eroded off yet again. And only *then* were the Cambrian sediments deposited!

Now let's look at the Cambrian record in the Tapeats Sandstone. We find no fossils in the sandstone itself, but find trilobites in the green shale, the Bright Angel Shale, directly overlying. And these trilobites are by no means the oldest Cambrian trilobites that are known. Why don't we find anything in the sandstone below?

For two reasons. First, certain types of rock are more favorable for the preservation of fossils. A shale, which represents deposition of fine-grained silts and clays in quiet water, is much more likely to preserve fossils than a sandstone, which reflects deposition in more agitated water such as occurs near shore. (Silt and clay can't settle out in such agitated water. Only the sand can.) Shells and other remains generally don't survive being knocked around in an agitated environment. (Look at a modern beach!) Further, the pieces of shells that do survive and get buried tend to dissolve right away, because sand is porous and water flows through easily.

Second, a sedimentary rock is a record of a particular paleoenvironment.

The type of rock reflects the sort of conditions that were there when the sediments were deposited. Even if a rock is the right age, say, for certain kinds of trilobites to be found in it, the rock will contain no trilobite remains if the trilobites didn't live there (or, at least, live close enough that their remains could wash in). This facies control, as it's called, of fossil occurrences is a common headache in geologic correlation. Different critters lived in different places *at the same time*. Thus, because you find different fossils in different rocks doesn't necessarily mean the rocks are of different ages.

We can already see that the "simple" Cambrian record in the Grand Canyon is not really so simple. In this, it's like other Cambrian records in North America, and indeed throughout the world. Let's now follow the Cambrian rocks in the Grand Canyon westward and see what happens. In the western part of the Grand Canyon, we find different species of trilobites in the Bright Angel Shale at the top of the Tapeats, older species than we found where we started. Why should this be?

The Cambrian strata become older as we go westward. The Tapeats Sandstone in the western Grand Canyon is older than that in the east, even though you can trace strata continuously, pretty much, from the western side into the eastern. Continuous rock strata being different ages at different places? That seems absurd. But it's a natural outgrowth of the way sediments get deposited.

First, remember that a sedimentary rock is a record of a paleoenvironment. In the Grand Canyon, for example, Tapeats Sandstone is overlain everywhere by Bright Angel Shale. Because the Tapeats was formed by deposition in agitated, near-shore water, while the Bright Angel was formed by deposition of silt and clay in quiet water, then everywhere agitated-water conditions were followed by quiet-water conditions.

Fair enough. But it does not necessarily follow that quiet-water conditions follow everywhere *at the same time*. Consider: If the Tapeats is the record of deposits from agitated water near the shore, then shale was being deposited at the same time offshore. Now what happens if sea level doesn't change? As sediment continues to be brought in, sand and shale continue to be deposited, and the shoreline gradually builds out into what was formerly sea (the shoreline "progrades"). As the shoreline progrades, sand is deposited over shale. In the geologic record, you would end up with shale (quiet-water deposits) overlain by sandstone (agitated-water deposits), the sandstone bed reflecting this prograding shoreline. Thus, the sandstone, although always younger than shale at a given place, is different ages at different places; it becomes younger in the direction it prograded.

Now, alternatively, suppose that sea level is rising sufficiently fast that sedimentation can't keep up. In this case, the shoreline will be submerged as the sea advances, and quiet-water deposition will follow agitated, near-shore deposition. In the geologic record, the result will be a sandstone (the near-shore deposits) overlain by shale.

The fact that we everywhere find quiet-water deposits (Bright Angel Shale) on top of agitated-water deposits (Tapeats Sandstone) indicates that sea level was rising in the early part of the Cambrian period. Rising sea level also fits finding older trilobites in the shale in the western Canyon: The sea invaded from the west. By the time the water rose enough to inundate the area of the eastern Canyon, the trilobites were of a newer type.

Such a rising of sea level is called a marine transgression (no criminal behavior on the ocean's part is implied!). Why would sea level rise? Well, you can imagine two basic ways; either there's more water, or less room in the ocean basins. It seems the latter explanation is the correct one. At times of very active seafloor spreading, the ocean floor swells, and the sea spills onto the continents. Marine transgressions are well preserved in the geologic record, because sediments are deposited over very wide areas on top of the continents.

Now, continuing our traverse westward, we find that the Grand Canyon suddenly ends just east of the Nevada-Arizona state line. The Colorado River emerges from tall cliffs, the Grand Wash Cliffs, which mark a boundary between two areas with contrasting geologic structure. To the east, the Grand Canyon is cut into an area that is geologically simple, the Colorado Plateau, where the strata are flat-lying and little subsequent deformation by folding or faulting has taken place.

To the west of the Grand Wash Cliffs is the Basin and Range (yes, the title of the John McPhee book) geologic province. The Basin and Range consists of tilted blocks separated by large, north-south running faults. Although the Paleozoic strata have been broken up and tilted, however, the strata are still readily recognizable in the tilted blocks. The Basin-and-Range faulting and tilting is geologically recent. It wasn't there in the Paleozoic.

As we continue westward into Nevada, however, a strange thing happens near Las Vegas (no, not the gambling!). The Paleozoic section starts to thicken very rapidly. Over the span of about 100 miles, from where we began in the Grand Canyon, the section has thickened by about 10%, and most of that thickening was not in the Cambrian strata. Now, over the space of perhaps 20 miles, the section increases perhaps tenfold in thickness, becoming thousands of feet thick. Further, not only do strata become thicker, but time intervals missing in the Canyon start to fill in. We see strata from the Ordovician and Silurian, for example, the two periods younger than the Cambrian. Rocks from these periods are absent in the Grand Canyon; either they were never deposited, or they were eroded away before younger strata were laid down.

And thousands of feet of sediment *older* than the Cambrian start to appear below the strata corresponding to the Tapeats Sandstone!

We have entered the Cordilleran Geosyncline. (cor-di-YER-ran, properly. "Cordillera" is Spanish for "mountains;" the spine of mountains that run down North America from Alaska into Central America are collectively



termed the Cordillera.) A geosyncline is a long half-trough that contains an extremely thick — kilometers thick — section of sedimentary rock. In current plate-tectonics theory, these thick sediments are thought to be the deposits at a passive continental edge. The passive edge is the trailing edge, the side that's moving away from the spreading center, rather than the leading edge that's running into other plates. On the trailing edge, an enormous wedge of sediments accumulates, the wedge tapering toward the continent and thickening out to sea. The Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains of North America are modern examples of geosynclines; they are accumulations of detritus thousands of feet thick.

Although the thickness of sediment in a geosyncline is measured in kilometers, the water was always fairly shallow, less than a few hundred feet deep, and occasionally it was shallow enough to wade in. The crust sinks as dirt is dumped on it, making room to dump more dirt, so that the crust sinks some more . . . and so forth. You build up very thick accumulations that way.

The margin of the wedge, where the thin deposits over the continent (the deposits that reflect marine transgressions) start to thicken rapidly into the geosyncline, is called the hinge line. The hinge line for the Cordilleran Geosyncline runs roughly north-south through the vicinity of Las Vegas.

Over a century ago, geologists noted that geosynclines are sites of mountain building — rocks in ancient geosynclines have invariably been folded, heavily faulted, and often metamorphosed. In current plate-tectonics theory, it's thought that geosynclines are the sites of mountain building because they're vulnerable. If the passive margin turns into an active, or leading, margin, the geosyncline is the first thing to undergo collision with an adjacent plate. Thus, a geosyncline is a site for mountain building not because of the great thickness of sediment, but because of its position at the edge of a continent.

Throughout the Paleozoic Era, the western edge of North America was a passive margin upon which the deposits in the Cordilleran Geosyncline were laid down. However, about 200 million years ago the pattern of sea-floor spreading changed (the Atlantic opened), and the western edge of North America changed from passive to active. The newly active western edge has subsequently undergone many major collisions with other plates coming in from the Pacific. Thus, the rocks of the Cordilleran Geosyncline, as in all geosynclines, are highly deformed.

Before the recent Basin-and-Range faulting, the Cordillera underwent several episodes of thrust faulting, a type of faulting in which great sheets of rock slide over one another like shingles on a roof. Such faulting is probably due to the tremendous compressional stresses from continental collision. Such complications make it difficult to decipher the geologic record in the geosyncline. It's as though the book from which you "read" the geologic record has had pages torn out and pasted in out of order. The geology is a good deal more difficult to figure out than in a layer cake like the Colorado

Plateau.

What does the Precambrian-Cambrian Boundary look like in the Cordilleran Geosyncline in southern Nevada? Well, the first trilobites, genera with names like (appropriately!) *Nevadia* and *Nevadella*, show up in shales and siltstone that are older than the Tapeats in the Grand Canyon. However, thousands of feet of sedimentary rock occur continuously below these trilobites. Much of these strata are sandstones or quartzites, coarse-grained rocks that, like the Tapeats, aren't good for preserving fossils. Even so, however, great thicknesses of fine-grained strata occur, including green shales and siltstones that resemble Cambrian formations like the Bright Angel — except for their complete, utter, and total absence of metazoan fossils. There is no major discontinuity in this sedimentary record at the Boundary. The major sedimentary discontinuity is at the base of the geosynclinal sequence itself, and the age of the basal strata is probably about 700 million years — a hundred million years older than the base of the Cambrian.

If we continue farther westward, into eastern California, the rock facies change somewhat. We're still dealing with a stack of sedimentary rock kilometers thick, but we're getting farther offshore and the character of the sediments changes. We find less coarse-grained rock (quartzites and sandstones), and more fine-grained rock (shale and siltstone). Such fine-grained rocks are better for preserving fossils, and indeed we find somewhat older trilobites, particularly a genus called *Fallotaspis*. These are among the oldest trilobites known.

More interestingly, however, Professor Jeffrey Mount and his students at the University of California have recently found *pre-trilobite* skeletal fossils in these rocks. These are members of the Tommotian fauna, named from the locality in Siberia where such fossils were first found. They include primitive types of mollusks and brachiopods, some poorly preserved fossils whose relationships are uncertain, and trace fossils — burrows, tracks, and so on.

The Tommotian fossils also include archeocyathids, curious cup-shaped animals that remained fixed at one place, like oysters or sponges. Like modern sponges, archeocyathids were probably filter feeders, drawing seawater through themselves to extract nutrients from it. In some places, archeocyathids were so abundant they built primitive reefs. They became extinct at the end of Early Cambrian time, and are the only entire phylum that is known to have become extinct.

Below the occurrences of the Tommotian fauna, however, there are still many hundreds of feet of fine-grained sedimentary rock that should contain fossils, if fossils existed.

It's now known, too, that there are lots of other places in the world, besides the Cordilleran Geosyncline, where you can continue from fossil-bearing, earliest Cambrian strata directly into unfossiliferous strata below. Such areas occur in Newfoundland, Siberia, the Atlas Mountains of northern Africa, and elsewhere.

In some places, where conditions for preserving fossils were exceptionally good, an ancient soft-bodied metazoan fauna has been discovered. This assemblage of fossils, which is called the Ediacaran (ee-dee-ACK-ar-uhn) fauna after the locality in Australia where it was first discovered, consists of primitive coelenterates (jellyfish), some primitive annelids (segmented worms), and several critters whose affinities are doubtful. The Ediacaran fauna is probably older than the Tommotian fauna, but it may overlap somewhat in age.

As demonstrated during our geologic tour, the notion that a long history of metazoan evolution was wiped clean from the geologic record is just not true. The impression of a Lipalian interval was based on examination of localities like the Grand Canyon, not on the geosynclinal sections where a much more complete record is preserved. It's true that the transition from fossil-free to fossil-bearing strata at the Precambrian-Cambrian Boundary is not as well preserved as some other parts of the geologic record, because sea level was relatively low. But that's no big deal — the only really well-preserved times are those representing a marine transgression. (By the way, sea level is also low at present; it won't be well preserved in the geologic record, either.)

When they did finally arise, metazoans arose rapidly. As they arose, too, they underwent rapid adaptive radiation, evolving into different forms and filling different ecologic niches.

Still, however, although the Cambrian explosion happened rapidly it didn't happen all at once. There's a problem with perspective here. The major radiation of skeletal animals, which we think of as the Cambrian explosion, took about 10 million years. This includes the evolution of the Tommotian and subsequent early trilobite faunas. When you think of that time as the difference between, say, 570 and 580 million years ago, it seems short. But 10 million years is still a *lot* of time! (In fact, there's an international committee of geologists and paleontologists that is deciding *where*, exactly, to define the Precambrian-Cambrian Boundary.)

And the scale of the Cambrian explosion becomes even longer if you include the Ediacaran fauna, the earliest indubitable metazoans. These soft-bodied fossils probably are no older than 700 million years at the most, but the difference between 570-million-ish and 700 million is over 100 million years — more time than has elapsed since the dinosaurs became extinct.

Not only is the geologic continuity striking, there's also no evidence of any major geochemical change at the Boundary. I'll describe a couple of my favorite examples suggesting late Precambrian and Paleozoic rocks are more alike than different.

In the Cordilleran Geosyncline around Las Vegas, the lowermost geosynclinal strata that are exposed, almost 10,000 feet below the first occurrence of trilobites, are a kind of limestone called an oolite. An oolite is made of ooids, spheres of calcium carbonate somewhat smaller than a BB. (Ooids are

named from the Greek *oion*, "egg," for their shape. If you want to be super-correct, you can say "oh-oh-id," but most geologists just say "ooh-id.")

Ooids have a concentric structure, like an onion or a hailstone, that consists of layers of calcium carbonate. They are formed in tropical seas where water is warm, shallow, and subject to wave action. Needles of calcium carbonate precipitate inorganically from the seawater onto the ooid, and are gradually flattened to form the layers as the ooid rolls around in the waves. Ooids and oolites are extremely common in the geologic record. In fact, ooids are forming today on the Bahama bank, and making deposits that look very much like this ancient limestone. Certainly, if calcium carbonate could precipitate *inorganically* to form ooids in the late Precambrian, seawater was not too acidic for shells!

There was probably no big change in oxygen content in the late Precambrian, either. Remember those late Precambrian sedimentary rocks in the Grand Canyon? One formation in that sequence, the Dox Sandstone, is a redbed, a rock stained red with ferric oxide. Redbeds make much spectacular scenery in the southwest USA, and they are generally thought to reflect an oxidizing atmosphere, because they form slowly by the reaction of dissolved oxygen in groundwater with iron minerals. Most of the redbeds you see in *Arizona Highways* are rocks of late Paleozoic or early Mesozoic age; from about 300 to 150 million years old.

The Dox looks very similar to those rocks, and it's about a billion years old.

What about that late Precambrian glaciation? Well, it is there, all right. Or, more likely, glaciations. The evidence for late Precambrian glaciation is found in many places worldwide and seems to occur in rocks varying from 900 to perhaps 700 million years in age. In the area I've been describing in the southern Great Basin, there is evidence of glacial activity in the late Precambrian. But the evidence occurs in rocks below the late Precambrian geosynclinal strata; in fact, they're below that oolite that I just talked about, and are separated from it by a major unconformity. The glaciation in the southern Nevada area is probably not younger than 750 million years.

Again, we have a problem of perspective; there's no evidence that the glaciation(s) were synchronous, and "approximately 900 to 700 million years ago" covers a slug of time. Further, glaciations are common in the rock record, and they just aren't that big a deal. The areas north and south of about 45° bear the brunt of a glacial age; the tropics don't know the glaciers are there.

Well, OK, so the Cambrian explosion didn't happen all at once. We're still left with a big problem. In fact, it seems worse since we now can't sweep away a long history of metazoan evolution with catastrophic lunar tides or whatever. What might account for this rapid radiation?

Biologic evolution. Rapid and accelerating changes followed from lots of little steps that were cumulative and synergistic. The stage had been set

about a billion years ago, with the development of eukaryotic cells, efficient oxygen-metabolizers. (The oxygen atmosphere was probably already in place.) Then, the slow but accelerating evolution of soft-bodied metazoans, the Ediacaran fauna, was another step. The development of the coelum (SEE-lum), or body cavity, was yet another. Indeed, some critters probably used the coelum as a hydrostatic skeleton, inflating themselves like balloons. Such a skeleton would provide enough rigidity that ecologic niches such as burrowing would become available for the first time. Meanwhile, a biochemical mechanism to handle calcium had been developed, because calcium is important in a multitude of physiologic functions such as muscle movement.

The critical step may have been the invention of croppers, herbivores and carnivores: Grazers to graze and hunters to hunt, in addition to the photosynthetic plants, scavengers, and filter feeders that already existed. Modern studies of ecology have shown that when croppers exist, the food web becomes highly complex because lots of ecologic niches become available. With the rise of croppers, evolutionary pressure for skeletons developed, and here were these calcium metabolic pathways already waiting in the wings. . . .

The pieces were all in place, and suddenly things started happening Real Fast. As one paleontologist has written, the "appearance of a skeletal record in the Cambrian was simply part of the general diversification and requires no special explanation." (Stanley, 1976).

Another note on perspective is appropriate. We tend to focus on the appearance of hard skeletons, because they're so obvious in the fossil record. However, even skeletal Cambrian life was not nearly as differentiated, as diversified into different ecologic niches, as present life. In fact, terrestrial life *after* the calamitous Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction was still more diverse than it was at the close of the entire Cambrian period!

It's a bootstrap problem; you must create ecologic niches before they can be filled, but an ecology must already be diverse to contain ecologic niches. Diversity begets diversity. It's like introducing a revolutionary new product into an economy: For example, who's going to buy an automobile without a network of highways to drive it on, and a chain of service stations for fuel? In fact, automobile ownership grew very slowly for several decades and then suddenly accelerated. A similar evolution is occurring now with the gradual introduction of personal computers.

Other examples of drastic acceleration of change following a much longer interval of very slow change are easy to find. Look, for example, at recent history, with the explosive growth of Western technological civilization. And yet, no sharp discontinuity, no external event, sets off the present. The changes transforming Western civilization — and the world! — stem from trends that go deep in the past, indeed, go well into medieval times.

The present will have fossil significance, too, with the "explosion" of

such artifacts as automobiles and beer cans in the sedimentary record. Also, note that because of the scale of geologic time it will be very hard to resolve the few thousand years between, say, clay pots and Coke bottles. All artifacts are going to show up virtually instantaneously.

For an example-to-be, we have the imminent expansion into space. After being trapped on our planet for four and a half billion-odd years, terrestrial life is about to expand into the Galaxy. Even if we're forever restricted to velocities of only a few percent of lightspeed, settling the Galaxy will just take on the order of 10 to 100 million years.

The Cambrian explosion was biologic, not geologic. The explosion stemmed from the dynamics of life itself.

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# THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT δ by Grendel Briarton art: Tim Kirk



*Some historically knowledgeable readers have wondered how we will number the sixth exploit of this series. Answer: in a way suiting the redoubtable adventurer's stellar talents.*

When Ferdinand Feghoot went back to 1908 to delay the fall of the Chinese Empire,\* his efforts were frustrated by the Empress Dowager, old Tzu Hsi, who refused all advice. He, however, loyally acceded to every one of her wishes.

Finally, she revealed her plans to him. "The Foreign Devils plotting my downfall," she screamed, "shall never succeed! I have formed a corps of one thousand brave women warriors, tall, strong, handsome girls from the North, armed with our traditional *jingals*. They shall terrify the Barbarians!"

*Jingals* were huge, obsolete muzzle-loaders firing inch-and-a-half balls, but Feghoot was too wise to argue.

"My women must have stirring music to parade to," she went on. "Choose it! Teach my military musicians to play it!"

Feghoot set promptly to work, and three weeks later the parade took place outside the Forbidden City. Every foreign ambassador was invited.

Feghoot himself, pleading ear trouble, did not attend, but immediately afterwards he was summoned before the ecstatic ruler. "Did we prevail, oh Daughter of Heaven?" he asked.

"The mere sight of my women and the terror inspired by your music threw the Foreign Devils into utter dismay!" she replied. "Some gaped or cried out. Others clapped their hands to their ears. What do you call that wonderful music?"

"It is called *Jingal Belles*," said Ferdinand Feghoot.



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\*He ruled as the Emperor Fei Hu, 357-329 B.C.

**A NIGHT  
ON THE  
INTERCHANGE**  
by James Haralson  
art: Artifact







*James Haralson is burdened with a B.S. in journalism (Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo) — like “a large, flea-infested albatross, worn around the neck,” he says. Since graduation, he has been writing, while sustaining himself with the customary variety of odd jobs, including a stint at a born-again Christian ad agency. This, his first sale, was a most welcome 26th birthday present. He lives in Covina, CA.*

Howard wanted to get to the other side of the interchange.

From his cardboard haven nestled in a dense hillside thatch of prickly-pear cactus, the soaring, concrete columns and graceful, curving lanes, abuzz with traffic, meeting place of the San Bernardino, the Foothill, the Orange, and the Corona Freeways, were a minor obstacle, a toy.

“Piece of cake,” he mumbled, scratching an unshaven cheek. He let his gaze wander west, directly across a narrow gorge in front of him, to the hillside opposite. There, the grass was a deep, rich green, unlike the sere, scratchy vegetation surrounding him. He shifted in the cardboard box, got up on his knees. Through the spiny cactus, the other side was the coolest, most beautiful place in the world. He could pick out half a dozen spots which would be perfect for camping, which is what he called the way he lived. Camping. There were oak trees and verdant underbrush and even a small creek which appeared in the springtime.

It would have been a simple matter of scrambling down the gorge and climbing up the other side, except that the gorge happened to be filled with the Foothill Freeway, twelve wide lanes perpetually alive with speeding cars and trucks.

Howard had tried to cross that way once, a week before. The night had been foggy and cool, not unusual for autumn in Southern California. Standing on his hillside, he noticed how the fog magnified the roar below. He slipped easily under the two ten-foot-high chain-link fences which bordered his side and crossed the northbound lanes through a window in the traffic. He was surprised that the drivers, who surely must have seen his thin, lanky figure sprinting in the headlight beams, did not bother to honk their horns. They didn't slow down either, and Howard barely escaped a green Pinto station wagon doing eighty in the fast lane. He got a glimpse of the driver's face and it had chilled him. It was the face of a madman: cadaverous, with black eyes and a taut line for a mouth. Howard could have sworn, in the brief scrambling instant before he reached the center divider, that the driver was staring at him. After the green car flew past, Howard saw its brake lights flash and he turned to run but the car did not stop. It jogged part way into the adjacent lane and Howard heard a loud wap, and a dark, torn shape pirouetted away. Running up, he saw it was a dog. A German shepherd, from the look of a severed foreleg. He

walked away, sickened, head down, as other cars got what was left of the animal. The flaps of his army surplus field jacket billowed in the oily, automobile-driven wind.

The center divider was strewn with trash and hubcaps; radiator hoses and fan belts; dark, clotted bandages and empty, plastic I.V. bottles. The fence was high and of a different construction than the ordinary fences on the hillside, being a sort of slitted metal grid, painted green. Howard soon realized he would not be able to climb over it. The edges of the metal slats were razor sharp.

Shaken and dispirited, he recrossed the six lanes without trouble, and made his way up the hill to his hidden box.

Now, a week later, he thought he knew for sure how to get to the other side.

"All I have to do," he said to himself, rehearsing, "is walk around to the south-facing side of this hill and get down to the San Bernardino Freeway. Yeah." His voice was deep and powerful in the box, which had once contained a Sears Coldspot Spacemaster Frostless refrigerator. He had always hated the sound of his voice. Everywhere but in the box, it was thin and nasal.

"The San Bernardino is at ground level so all I have to do is walk west until I reach the other side. From there, I climb up and over the hills and come down into that nice shady place which I can see right over there but which I'll bet isn't even *visible* to anyone on the freeway. Yeah. Easy."

He took a drink of warm water from a plastic milk bottle and munched a handful of stale potato chips, reflecting. Food was another reason for moving. Moneyless except for rare handouts, he usually found enough food to live on in the trash bins of the Overlook, a restaurant three hills and a four hour hike to the east. On Sunday mornings, there were always half-eaten steaks, lettuce scraps, crusts of sourdough bread, and cartons of melted ice cream.

The food, Howard thought, was less than adequate. A phrase his wife, Clara, had often used on him, before she left him.

On the other side, he noted, he would have easy access to the large university on the south side of the interchange. An underpass, part of an on-ramp structure, made travel a simple matter. College students were soft touches and the thought of the numerous snack bars made his mouth water. Good food, he thought, and almost brand new, too. So close, he could make nightly trips. Restrooms. Drinking fountains. Showers in the gym. He closed his eyes in blissful reverie.

The sun beat down inside the box. Howard blinked at the bright, blue sky. "Tonight," he murmured and fell asleep.

By the time he reached the south side of the hills, the fog had rolled in, swathing the interchange in gray mist. The gloom was punctuated by the

bright orange streetlights on the various collector and feeder lanes. They created an outline of the structure in sodium vapor.

Howard sat on his haunches until the traffic became sparse and there were long spaces between the streaking headlights. The roar died away leaving the silence to be broken only by an occasional *brupp-brupp* as a solitary vehicle changed lanes and its tires encountered the small reflectors glued to the asphalt.

Howard had all his possessions with him, neatly wrapped up in an old red blanket, tied by a short length of nylon cord. He didn't have much: two empty plastic milk bottles, a wad of white toilet paper held together by a rubber band, a black comb missing five teeth, a toothbrush which he used twice a day sans toothpaste, a completely worn-out disposable razor, three blue socks, a pair of polka-dot boxer shorts, two paperback books he had never read — *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Illustrated Man* — and a transistor radio with a dead battery.

In the pockets of his jacket he had other things, items too small or fragile to be carried in the bundle, such as a bent pair of reading glasses which he kept in spite of his perfect vision, and many pencil stubs without erasers. There was also debris he had picked up and couldn't bear to part with, such as a fragment of golden glass which reminded him of a colored window he once had in his house in Whittier.

"Howard, oh Howard," the tape had begun. When Clara left him, she recorded a tape to him on their stereo system. Howard had come home, on time, as usual, from his job at Data Register, where he supervised a small crew which troubleshooted small computer boards. He always came home beat, his mind humming like the machines he worked with, and he liked to listen to music so he could be relaxed for dinner, which was always at 6:30. Each morning he put a tape into the player and set it up. The character of the day would be determined by the selection. There were Beach Boys days, Fleetwood Mac days, Rickie Lee Jones days and even Beethoven days. This particular day was a Clara day.

He had entered their small rented house on Puente Street in Whittier and found it stifling from having all the doors and windows closed on that September afternoon — strange, he thought, for Clara would have had them open. He had not the slightest inkling of suspicion that anything was amiss when he pushed the PLAY button and went into the kitchen for a Pepsi and Clara's sweet voice began blasting out full volume. Neighbors halfway down the block came out to their porches, kids stopped playing on the sidewalks. The ice cream vendor passing by the street even turned off his musical chimes so everyone could hear. Everyone.

"Howard, oh Howard. I hate this. It . . . I'm not here. I've moved out. I guess we both knew . . . No. That's not true. You don't know, you never knew." She took a deep breath and exhaled with an audible shudder. "I still love you. I really do. You're so gentle and sweet. I feel so crummy

doing it like this." There was a very long pause. "I'm not coming back. Okay? And I'm not going to tell you where I've gone. We can work out the property stuff later. I don't . . . It wasn't you. It was me. I . . ." And just before the tape ended, he heard a faint, faraway male voice say "Come on."

The ice cream man had clapped and turned his music back on. Everyone else went back to whatever they were doing, thinking it was a joke or a radio or TV show. Howard remembered going into the bedroom to check the dresser, to see if she was really gone. After that, he had only a dim memory of walking, and the voices of strangers shouting.

How many days it took for his consciousness to surface, he never found out. The next thing he knew, he was sitting on a sunny bench at the end of Hope Street, just off Wilshire, still holding the unopened can of Pepsi. One shoe was missing, his Arrow shirt was torn, and he reeked from not having pulled down his pants to relieve himself. Ashamed to go back home, he began to search the trash for other clothes.

Time resumed its normal trundle then, and thirteen months separated that bench from the cold, late October hillside where Howard now waited.

He looked up. The entire interchange was empty. There were no headlights in sight in any direction. With her voice ringing in his mind, as it had every day since that September afternoon, he started down.

The ground was soft and he kept stumbling on the steep incline. Dirt got into his loose sneakers and he closed his eyes to the dust, coughing.

A wide orange-lit lane stopped his descent, and without looking around, he began to run along the shoulder, the bundle tucked under his arm like a football. He kept his head down, breathing hard, and it was several minutes before he realized the roadway under his feet was rising and curving to the left, to the south.

He stopped under a streetlight. Beyond a guardrail, which had not been there before, was a blank wall of fog. He looked over the edge and caught a glimpse of a taillight far below; a car heading west, he felt sure, on the San Bernardino Freeway. He could hear the swoosh of phantom cars echoing off unseen pillars and abutments. Somewhere above him hovered the Orange Freeway, invisible in the fog.

He was uneasy standing still, so he continued to walk, the chill reaching him through his jacket. He wiped the sweat from his face, trying to figure out where he went wrong. He smelt of dirt and dry grass. There was already a blister on his right heel.

"Ah!" he said softly, gazing at the roadway which rose up from where he walked until even the streetlights were lost. "That's it. This must be some ramp I couldn't see from the hill. It must be between me and the San Bernardino. I should've looked around. There was probably a sign and I missed it." He sighed and smiled. "Less than adequate, Howard.

Well, all I have to do is go back. . . .”

As he spoke, the world around him silently exploded with light. He turned around to face the source, but his eyes watered and blinked. The light was brilliant white, like the sun, but there were also smaller red lights, some of them flashing. Howard stood helpless and shivering, holding out a hand.

He heard a car door open and the crunch of hard leather soles. A figure appeared, silhouetted, and stood with hands on hips, watching him. Howard squinted and squirmed.

“Well?” the figure said loudly. It was a female voice.

Howard brought his hand down. “Uh . . .”

There was a long pause.

The figure took a step forward. “What’s the matter with you?” The voice was harsh. “Say something, freak.”

“Wha . . . Wha . . .”

“Why do I get all the crisps? What’s the matter, freak, forget to take your lithium? Huh?”

“I got . . . lost . . .” His eyes were becoming adjusted to the glare of the patrol car floodlights and he could see the policewoman’s gun and night-stick and badge. Her face was largely hidden but her eyes gleamed: pinpoints of cold light. He gagged on her perfume. Rancid strawberries.

“Ahhh. Poor baby’s lost. What are you doing on the freeway? Huh? You know you’re not supposed to be on the freeway without a car, don’t you? What are you doing way the *Hell* up here?” She was speaking as to a large, stupid child. “Come on, freak. Drop that thing. Let’s go find your mommy.”

There was male laughter from inside the patrol car.

“Highway Patrol gets all the loonies!” yelled the policeman who sat behind the wheel, hidden in the light. The policewoman turned and giggled like a little fat girl with a mouthful of grapes.

As she stepped forward to grab Howard’s arm, a car roared out of the mist, traveling at incredible speed. Howard got a glimpse of it as it sped up the road — a green station wagon. It kicked up small rocks, which pinged on the side of the patrol car, and was lost in the fog in seconds.

The policewoman swore again, jumped into her seat and slammed the door. The patrol car jumped away, tires scrabbling on the shoulder gravel, floods burning a hole in the gloom. The woman yelled “Freak!” out of her window and then she too was swallowed by the fog.

Spots danced in front of Howard’s eyes for several moments, and then he turned and ran back the way he had come, the stench of burning rubber in his nostrils.

He had not traversed the distance to the nearest streetlight when he heard behind him a loud squealing of tires followed by a hideous, prolonged impact. He stopped running, the hair rising on the back of his

neck.

Then there was another sound, a softer sound, and he strained to hear. It sounded like a howl. Like many howls. The sound stopped.

Howard stood there, between streetlights, aching to go on, the yearning for his home in the green hills a palpable weight in his chest.

With a deep sigh, he turned away from the hills, retucked his bundle under his arm and began to walk.

Then he began to jog. The blister burned, as did his throat. The roadway became steeper and wider and he counted the streetlights; after six, the fog was so thick each light was only able to illuminate a small circle around the aluminum stanchion. Beyond that circle was total darkness. He slowed to a walk in order to feel his way along the guardrail.

Three more lights, and he thought he could see something ahead, a dim red glow. The glow increased gradually, it was a flame, and soon he could make out scattered shapes. There was furtive movement and the scurry of small feet. The fog was disturbed, curling over the side of the roadway. Howard stepped into a zone of clear air.

The two automobiles, crumpled and twisted, sat on the dark, shiny concrete. The patrol car was closest, ten steps from where he stood. Its white doors were caved in, the array of floodlights shattered and dangling. All the windows had been smashed and a group of silent, black dogs were enthusiastically tearing pieces from the two inert occupants. The only sound was that of their frenzied breathing and the ripping of tan fabric.

Howard stood frozen, terrified that his slightest movement would bring the pack down on him. He looked beyond the patrol car and saw the station wagon. It was folded like an accordion, and a spout of flame was issuing from a gash in the middle. The light was garish, flickering, and the long shadows danced, reflecting in the broken glass and strips of chrome flashing. No dogs scavenged the remains of the other driver and Howard craned his neck trying to see him, but the green car was empty.

A wet snuffle made him look down. One of the dogs was quietly sniffing at his feet. Howard did not move and tried to keep his expression neutral. It was a German shepherd and its fur was charcoal black, as if singed. It smelled of gasoline and strawberries.

It looked up at him and Howard almost cried out. Its eyes were holes: like vacant windows through which he could see to a great depth, where a monstrous fire raged unchecked. He swayed, gripped by vertigo, and would have blacked out had not a bone-scraping voice to his left made an eerie, bubbling grunt and caused the dog's head to turn.

Howard wasted no time looking for the owner of the terrible voice. He ran back into the fog, stumbling blindly, with rasping laughter at his back. He ran until the laughter faded and then he stopped, uncertain. Cold sweat dripped on his tongue.

He heard a new sound behind him — the muffled patter of silent animals — and he raced deeper into the darkness, holding his bundle out in front like a shock absorber.

Suddenly a bright red light appeared a few yards to his right. At first he thought it was the flame again, that he had gone in a circle, and he froze, expecting the dogs to bring him down any second.

Then he saw it was coming from a large, bare bulb apparently suspended in midair. He lunged toward it.

The patter was coming from all directions now, getting louder. The animals were beginning to tighten their circle. As he approached the light, a door materialized in the fog. No wall, just a door. It was flat and plain, painted beige, and bore a large sign which stated in tall gray letters: **NO TRESPASSING. EMPLOYEES ONLY. VIOLATORS WILL BE PUNISHED.**

Howard ignored the sign and wrenched at the tarnished brass handle. The door opened and he jumped into the new darkness inside. As he did so, the door snapped shut behind him, sealing out the fog, and he heard a faint whirring and several clicks. He pushed at the door, but it wouldn't open again. He felt for a handle or latch but his fingers detected nothing but the smooth, cold surface of the wall. Even the very edges of the door seemed to have melted away.

It was not quite pitch dark. A dim light at his feet became visible as his eyes adjusted and he made out a steep staircase in the floor from which cold, stale air was issuing, smelling of mint-scented disinfectant. As he reached for the railing, the wall erupted with the sound of scraping. It made his teeth ache, like dozens of sharp little claws on a chalkboard. He went down.

He descended for a long time, inching slowly. His sneakers could find no grip on the stairs and he kept slipping. Whenever he did and fell on his seat, never letting go of the railing, he could feel the slick surface. It was concrete, like everything else, polished to the slickness of glass.

The stairs became steeper as he went down, a single, uninterrupted flight. Soon, the steps were no more than ledges on a long, sloping wall. Each one was slimmer than the last, and Howard decided it would be easier to shimmy down the railing as if it were a fireman's pole. He noticed for the first time that the railing had no supports. It simply hung over the side of the stairs unconnected to anything.

He put both arms around it and hugged his bundle. He kicked off, with his right ear touching the metal, and squeaked down. By the time the light had increased enough for him to see the details of his surroundings, the railing was completely vertical and the stairs had flattened out to become one of four walls of a narrowing shaft.

Howard was calm. He gave no thought to the predicament he was in, and put aside worry about how he was going to get back up. That would



come later. He was at ease, trusting in his ability to make the right decisions instinctively. He had felt that way in L.A., on the streets. Wandering among the misfits — old alcoholics and young junkies; the mental patients turned out because there wasn't room for them in the hospitals; the lost and haunted women — his family.

With his mind running coolly, efficiently, he looked around, and what he saw made him come to an instant stop, his legs squeezing the railing to brake.

The walls were covered with writing, layer after layer of graffiti in languages he had never seen before. The concrete was completely obscured. There were faded inscriptions in crayon and felt pen; indecipherable pencil scrawls and strings of elaborate symbols in vertical rows; faint chiselings of geometric designs. There were crude pictures of animals and trees. Someone had outlined their hand with black paint. Howard gripped the railing hard and reached over. His hand fitted perfectly. Someone else had written paragraph after neat paragraph in what appeared to be blood. *Ich bin unschuldig!* exclaimed the writer.

He let himself slip slowly down, all the while scanning the walls. The light grew brighter and the railing thinner, harder to hold, burning his hands. The graffiti became less plentiful and blurred, as if no one was allowed to linger this far down. Finally, he found what he was looking for. It was virtually the last inscription, and it was in English. Three short sentences —

**Up's down.**

**Light's dark.**

**Gode's not.**

Howard unsnapped a jacket pocket and took out a pencil stub. He fumbled and nearly dropped it. It was only an inch long. Holding the railing and bundle with one hand, legs locked to hold, he swung over to the wall. He brought up the pencil and, because he couldn't think of anything else to write, he made a small x beside the three sentences. He paused, looked at his mark, and then circled it.

At that moment, his grip failed. He grabbed at the railing, dropping the pencil and his bundle. His legs flailed and bicycled and found no support. His sweaty palms could not hold him. He closed his eyes and fell towards the light.

An instant later he hit bottom, plopping onto a scruffy linoleum floor. He quickly collected his pencil and bundle and stood up unhurt. The railing next to him was as thin as a soda straw. It continued down into a hole in the floor around which the linoleum was cracked and curled.

Howard wiped his face and smoothed his short hair. Then he pulled his jacket tight around him, for the air was cold and musty, as if someone had

left the air conditioner on too long.

He looked up into the shaft, curious, still calm, trying to see the place where he made his mark. He couldn't. The walls were different. They were covered with the old linoleum as far up as the light carried.

He stepped out of the small alcove where he had landed and into a short corridor illuminated by long fluorescent tubes. The lights were uncovered and dirty; half were burned out. The walls were painted brown from the floor to waist height and beige from there up and including the ceiling. Music was playing in a very brightly lit room at the end of the corridor and Howard couldn't help but walk towards it.

It was a cafeteria. All the places were set with white plastic forks, knives, and spoons on white paper placemats. The long tables of white formica were all snugged up with white enamel metal folding chairs. There were forty rows of tables and chairs and each row was a hundred yards long.

The right wall was set with countless glass doors: in fact, the doors *were* the wall; and adjacent to each, a small red jewel glittered. Several extremely tall ladders, mounted on wheels, were placed at intervals along the wall, for the glass doors stretched from the floor to the vaulted ceiling, through which clear white light diffused.

The left wall was completely covered with hundreds of microwave ovens of every style and manufacture, stacked neatly one on the other. A black plastic profusion of timer dials and rubber feet.

The bright, pearly light allowed no shadows, and although it did get hazy at the far end, Howard could see that he was alone in the huge room. Dazzled, still clutching his bundle of red cloth and pencil stub, he walked slowly over to the right wall and when he saw there was indeed food, an insane, ridiculous variety of food behind the myriad glass doors, he whispered a word in awe: "Heaven . . ."

"Heaven?"

He spun with a gasp at the heavy male voice, and his pencil stub skittered away under the tables. The tinny music clicked off — it had been playing "I Wanna Hold Your Hand," performed on a buzzy organ.

A man in a frayed black suit was sitting in one of the folding chairs. He had thinning hair, thick, horn-rimmed glasses, and a sad expression. He was fumbling with the clasp on his thin, black tie, elbows resting on a large, leather-bound book.

"Is that what you said? Heaven?" The man finished with the clasp — a small, gold figure-eight, lying on its side — and stood up. His chair groaned in relief. He was quite tall, nearly seven feet.

"You speak English, don't you?" he asked, brows furled.

Howard took a step backwards. "Yes . . . I . . ." He took a deep breath of the chilly air. "I'm sorry. I didn't see you there." His voice was almost lost in the cavernous room.

"That's because I just got here." The man smiled and when he did so, his ears tended to flatten along the side of his head. "You arrived unexpectedly. Otherwise, I would have met you at the door." He inclined his head at a tiny door in the far end wall. "Wisk is the name."

Howard was glad the man didn't offer to shake his hand. "Pleased to meet you. My name —"

"Howard Lang, age thirty," announced Wisk, reading from a sheet of paper. "Born in Whittier, California; you have a, oh excuse me . . . *had* a degree in electronic engineering from the University of California at Fullerton. Four years ago you married Clara Norton and one year ago you left her. Ten months after that, she divorced you."

"I left — Who are you?"

"That's the record, Howard. And my name is Wisk," he said, his voice heavy with practised sympathy. "Shall I go on?"

Howard leaned against the glass door nearest to him. **Delaware Punch, Naturally Sweetened**, read a hand-lettered stick-on label. Six heavy ceramic pitchers were crammed into the small space.

"Ahem. Well, there's not much left. After leaving her, you became a transient, wandering around Los Angeles and finally settling, more or less, in the virtually uninhabited hills between San Dimas and Pomona. Life was just too much for you, wasn't it?" He added the last sentence as if it were part of the record also.

Howard found himself nodding.

"Indeed. She had plans. She wanted to make something out of you. But you didn't want that," Wisk said, and shrugged. "It's an old, old story. Ah, well. Now you're here and you can forget about it."

He walked over and put a big, soft hand on Howard's shoulder. They began to walk towards the far end of the cafeteria. Howard's bundle rubbed against the doors. **Ham, Swiss on Wheat, dry; Gnu Liver, Ram's Tongue on French Roll, ketchup.**

"Think of this," said Wisk, "as a beginning, not an end. Don't worry about — My, that's odd." He was scanning the record sheet. He lifted his glasses and peered at it. "It appears your record is incomplete. Most unusual. The details of your untimely end are not listed."

"My end?"

"Yes. Hmmm." Wisk pulled a ballpoint pen from the pocket of his white shirt and laid the paper down on a table. "What was the last thing you remember before coming here?"

"Well, I was on the interchange, you know, and these weird dogs were chasing me and —"

"Dogs. Got it. Would you mind signing this, Howard? Right there."

Swept along by Wisk's professional manner, Howard did so. The writing on the sheet was dim, the typing full of crossouts and strikeouts. Wisk folded the paper and stuffed it in his coat pocket. Then he hefted the

large book.

"Your rule book. Study it very carefully. We operate on a strict point system here. No averaging, no bell curves." The tall man shrugged again. "Standards must be upheld." He leaned over and stage whispered. "Got to keep you-know-who happy."

Howard opened the book in the middle. The pages were so thin as to be translucent and the tiny, cramped printing went on and on without a break. The page number was 2,571 and he began to read the first line aloud: "'Motions, gestures, eye movements, or other spontaneous expressions of boredom are not allowed. Two points.' Uh . . ."

Wisk had put his hand over the page. "No reading aloud!" he shouted and his eyes flashed with a peculiar light behind the smudgy lenses. Howard saw the man's long, sharp incisors. Then Wisk smiled again. "Page nine forty-four. New arrivals are granted a grace period of two hours, so don't feel intimidated. Would you like something to eat?"

Howard closed the book and stuffed it under his arm with his bundle. "If it's all right," he said meekly.

"Oh, yes. You arrived between meal periods. The night shift won't be getting off for some time yet. What would you like? We have everything."

Howard stood for a long moment in thought. He waited until Wisk began to tap his black wingtips impatiently.

"I'll have some fudge brownies without walnuts," he said. "I hate walnuts."

Wisk grinned. "Splendid. We don't need the ladder and we won't need to heat. Right down there." He pointed to a tiny door next to the floor. "Touch the stone. You've been registered."

Howard touched the red jewel and the door hissed open. Inside was a tidy stack of perfectly square brownies. Howard picked up five, put them in his jacket's pocket, then took three more. The door closed by itself, as if it knew he was finished.

"Now, we really must be moving along."

"Where to? This is a wild place." The brownie was rich and totally devoid of walnuts. He rolled his eyes in appreciation.

"I couldn't say, Howard. I'm in Reception, not Placement. But I'm sure wherever you're sent, you'll fit in. That's our function. We mold and shape people to the system. But you'll find out about that." He eyed Howard's dirty clothes. "Oh, yes, you'll find out."

"What do you do here? Do you make something, or what?" Howard asked with his mouth full.

"'Do?' Here we don't 'do' anything. All your 'doing' should have been taken care of before you got here. Here, we just follow rules. Nothing else."

They continued to walk. Halfway to the far wall, Howard noticed that the glass doors were getting bigger. **Mountain Quail, One Covey,**

**broasted**, said a sticker by a large plate of golden brown birds.

Wisk looked at him with concern. "Do you really know where you are?"

Howard shrugged. "Some cafeteria under the interchange? Cal Trans? No?"

"Oh, dear," Wisk sighed. "I see I shall have to ease you into this. Why don't you tell me everything that happened to you up to the time you arrived here."

Howard told him about the green hills and the fog and the police. When he mentioned the man in the green car, Wisk stopped him.

"Yes. That would be David."

"He works for you?" Howard bumped into the glass doors again. Behind one of them hung a long side of gray meat, **Eland**, and next to it, **White Rhinoceros**, **Flanks**.

"David is one of our collectors. He was obviously collecting the two police officers whom you encountered. They're a high priority right now. Police officers, military men and women, computer people, they're all such orderly, organized souls. They respect rules. Each one brings along their own set which is added to the book. We can never get enough of them. Most run-of-the-mill souls don't last more than a week. Then it's to the kitchen, I'm afraid. Not that *you'll* be one of those. But go on."

"Well, there were these dogs and they were . . ." Howard stopped chewing at the memory of the crash.

"Dogs are useful tools for a collector," Wisk explained. "David, I believe, collects his own from the freeway system. I've always wanted to get into collecting myself. Fascinating work."

Howard put his brownie in a pocket, appetite gone. "Then the dogs chased me and I found a door. It was just there . . . in the fog."

"Ah. It's all clear now." Wisk walked faster, holding up a finger for emphasis. "You were simply caught in the field David set up for the officers. Wrong place, wrong time, for you. The door is the clincher. You see, it is the door to where we are. If only you hadn't come up the roadway to help. You should have kept going, back to your hills." He looked down. "What's done is done. The dogs caught you under the light, then?"

"What?" Howard looked away from a pile of pink carcasses ensconced behind a very tall door. It appeared that the pile had once been big and bulging, for there were smudges on the inside of the glass and the stack of meat had a frantic, disheveled look to it, unlike all of the other picture-perfect displays. A popular item, Howard thought and glanced at the label. What in the world is **Long Pig**?

"You met your fate, as it were, in front of the door?"

"No, I went inside. What are you talking about, 'fate?' "

"You opened the door? *You opened the door?*" Wisk glared at him wildly. "Mister Lang, wasn't there a sign on that door? A no trespassing

sign? A BIG no trespassing sign? Hmmm? Wasn't there?"

"I . . . uh, yes, yes there was . . ." Howard stuttered.

"*Mister Lang*, please open your rule book to the first page. Now."

Howard fumbled with the heavy book and dropped his bundle. Wisk growled and kicked it forcefully, his long leg making a great black arc. The wad of red cloth slid across the linoleum and hit the far wall with a thump.

"Open it, Lang!"

Howard slipped to his hands and knees and finally managed to pull the thick leather cover open. The type on the first page was the same as all the other pages: dense, gray, almost unreadable.

"What is the first sentence, Howard? Hmmm? What is the very first, most important, most absolutely vitally incredibly important sentence? Read it!"

" 'Obey all signs.' "

"Not out loud!"

"I'm sorry. Jeez, what's the big deal? There's nobody around." Through experience, Howard had discovered that a calm, even tone was best when dealing with rabid dogs and other mad things.

"Don't say that! He can hear everything. He can see everything. Everything, everything." Wisk made an effort to return his face to normal. He took a deep breath, exhaled hoarsely. Howard thought he saw steam coming out of the man's mouth.

"Very well. You opened the door," he continued, breathing heavily. "The dogs then reached you in the anteroom." He stated it not as a question but as an irrefutable fact, something which could not be altered, save at very high cost.

"Uh." Howard was distracted again. He was staring through the final, gigantic door. It reached all the way to the blinding ceiling, an immense, single sheet of thick glass. Behind it, hanging from a hydraulic crane, was a huge, blue-black whale. **Sperm** was the single word on the tiny sticker.

He turned back to Wisk and then looked past him, across the cafeteria. On the opposite wall, the microwave ovens had also grown. Some of them, he noted, were large enough for a person to step into, and some were much larger — gaping black boxes in which one could comfortably make lazy U-turns in a Cadillac. The last oven, directly across from the whale, looked like the door to a hangar for jumbo jets.

Howard remembered to speak. "No, no, they didn't get me. I escaped. Otherwise how could I be standing here?" He shook his head.

Wisk smiled benignly, as if Howard had spoken in an unknown language. "Pardon me?"

They had reached the end wall and stood next to the solitary door. It was made of wood, painted white, and had a large bent nail as a handle. Howard retrieved his bundle from where Wisk had kicked it. He

inspected the knots and tucked it back under his arm.

"I said I got away and came down the stairs. You got weird stairs here, you know that?"

Wisk was still smiling. "You entered the cafeteria through this door here?"

"No, I came in through that door way back there," Howard said. "Do you think I could use your restroom —"

The cry of anguish which cut him off caused the wall of glass doors to shudder. Howard dropped the heavy book. The cry came from the ceiling and it went on endlessly. The bright light flickered and dark shapes moved in the far corner.

Wisk was frozen, and tears began running down his pasty cheeks. The cry blocked out all other sound in the room. Howard could feel it reverberating through his body, clawing at his bones. He had only once in his life heard a cry of such animal pain. He had been a kid, and a neighborhood cat, not his although he fed it from time to time, was run over by a car before his eyes. The front tire passed directly over the cat's body and in the last instant, its yellow cat's eyes looking directly at his shocked, child's eyes, it had screamed. And he had screamed and screamed, and it took his mother's slap to make him stop.

This cry was the same, infinitely extended: a nameless cat being run over in slow motion. But this time, Howard didn't scream. He tilted his head back and yelled, "Stop it! Stop it! Damn it, that's enough!"

And the cry stopped.

Wisk was shivering violently, his body contorted, his face devoid of expression. Eyes closed, he was whispering a word, the same word, over and over.

Howard got close to him. "Out. Out. Out," he was whispering.

Howard looked around the cafeteria. No further sound came from the ceiling, but the light continued to flicker. It grew dark in the vaulted room.

With a ripping crash, the dark amorphous shapes moved out of the corner and began to turn over the white formica tables. They bludgeoned the chairs into tangled knots with deafening impacts of formless limbs and then threw them aside. "Wisk" they called in low whispers. "*You made a mistake, Wisk. We're coming for you, Wisk.*"

The voices made Howard's stomach turn. It was the sound of something dead and swollen being dragged over cemetery stones. The total despair of abandonment. Love lost forever. "*The kitchen, the kitchen, yes, the kitchen for you. Wisk . . .*"

White plastic utensils and paper placemats gathered together in the air and swirled around in the center of the room. It was as if a tornado was paying a visit to a Sunday afternoon picnic. All the glass doors flew open and the food was sucked out to feed the vortex. The lights dimmed almost

to extinction and the bank of microwaves hummed into life. There was a click and all the oven doors sprang open, adding their radiation to the raging tumult.

Howard rushed to the wooden door and yanked it open. Beyond the door was a void filled with twinkling stars. Above and below, there was only space. Howard took a last glance behind him. There was Wisk, who was now looking at him. His glasses had fallen off and his eyes were wide and yellow. "I signed you in," he said, his voice flat. The dark shapes were bearing down on him; and as Howard jumped, he heard the tall man mutter one last thing. "You freak. Why aren't you dead?"

Darkness closed around them both.

There was a fleeting instant of tumbling and Howard plopped onto grooved concrete with an "Oof," and blinked. He scrambled to his feet. He was on a freeway, in the middle lane of three. It was dark, but starlight from the clear sky permitted him to see. He ran to the shoulder, although there was no traffic. Past the guardrail of the dead freeway and far below, the silent, sleeping Earth stretched peacefully. A warm breeze stirred the cuffs of his old jeans. Howard crouched down — collapsed, really, in exhaustion — and leaned over the low rail. He murmured a word.

"Heaven?"

Howard shrieked and clutched at the rail. "No! I didn't say anything!"

"Whew! Hang on there, man."

Howard looked up. It was a young woman, younger than himself. A girl, in an old T-shirt. The shirt proclaimed **The Who**, hung straight down and was holed around the gawky shoulders. She had long, blond hair and a round face.

"I thought you were going to jump. Scared me to death," she said, and laughed. Howard thought it was the most beautiful laughter he had ever heard, like a kid discovering rain for the first time. It almost tinkled.

"You startled me."

She walked over and looked at him closely. Despite her childlike demeanor, her eyes were old and deep. "You got out, didn't you?" she whispered.

Her voice held such awe that Howard told her the whole story. The girl listened, motionless, as the stars wheeled overhead. At the end, she whistled. "You were lucky."

"I guess I was. What was that place?"

She smiled. "*You* know. Many blunder into it, but few escape. They *do* like their rules up there, don't they?"

Howard laughed. "You should've seen that book."

"I have. I'm from there originally. Got out a long time ago." She whistled again, thinking. "*Long* time ago."

Howard began to bubble with questions. "And you came here? Why? Who are you? What *was* that place?"



She shifted her weight. Howard noticed that she carried nothing, had no possessions at all that he could see, and that she wore soft, open sandals made of stiff cloth and rope.

She smiled easily. Her front teeth were prominent, which accounted for her slight lisp. "Well, you told me yourself about that inscription in the tunnel. Just think about that. If I told you right off, you'd probably jump. And that would be," she paused to grin, "a less than adequate thing to do. You people have things *all* turned around."

Howard started to say something, but the girl looked at the stars and said, "I've got to be going. Getting late."

"Wait, wait," said Howard, and he untied his bundle and dumped the contents on the ground. He picked up one of the paperback books and fished another pencil stub out of a pocket.

"Could I have your autograph?"

She gave him an exaggerated funny look and said, "Hmmm. Dis guy needs help. You don't even know who I am. Oh, all right. It isn't every day, I suppose. In fact, it isn't *any* day. I'll do it if you promise not to read it until you've had some sleep. You look beat."

She wrote for a few minutes and then handed the book back. The air around her was fresh and clean. Standing close to her, he thought he could detect a faint halo of light around her head.

"There you go. And here I go. Good-bye, Howard. Maybe I'll see you again sometime. Then again, maybe not."

Howard didn't want her to leave. There was some quality, some special innocence or wisdom in her that he felt was lacking in himself. An acquaintance of ten minutes, he was falling in love with her.

"You just got here. Where are you off to? Can I come?"

"What would you want to come for? Your hills are right back there. See?" She gestured at a black mass a quarter mile away. "There's only one chain link fence in your way and it's down. Have fun."

"But where . . ."

"Oh, sorry. I'm heading south, Corona way. This is the Corona Freeway, after all. I think."

She set off walking and Howard happily sat down to retie his bundle. When she was about to go out of sight, he called to her.

"Is Corona a nice place?"

The girl turned and called back. "Naw," she said. "It's *Hell*." And there was clear laughter again on the night air.

Howard set off in the opposite direction and before too long found himself next to the hills he had longed for. They were inviting, warm and cool at the same time, and he climbed up.

The next day was a scorcher. The Santa Anas scoured the land and left the air dry and crackling. Howard sat in the shady grass under a big oak and sipped water from one of his bottles. He had spent the whole day

thinking about what the girl had said, the strange young-old girl, and about the inscription. And for the first time in thirteen months, he allowed himself to think about Clara.

With the sun blazing through the leafy branches, covering him with swaying spots of light, he decided he was ready to read what the girl wrote.

He picked up the ancient, battered copy of *The Illustrated Man*, and opened it to the title page. Then read aloud:

"'For Howard. Well, here we are (ha-ha). I wish you all the luck in the world in whatever you want to do. Remember always that you are human, just like everyone else (even the police), and that there really are no rules other than those created for you by evolution. Everything else is artificial.


"'I like to think of human beings as if they were natural phenomena, like thunderstorms. You don't tell a thunderstorm what to do. You can't. They're big and dangerous and if they threaten you, just get out of the way. I can't get angry at them, because they're simply acting the way they must act according to the laws of nature. But I can love them. Because I love this planet.

"'You said it yourself when you looked over the guardrail. You said "Home." Not Heaven.

"'Don't worry about being adequate, Howard. You're a thunderstorm.

"'Your friend, Scratch.'"

As Howard spoke the last word, the carefully written paragraphs faded from the yellowed page until not a pencil mark was left. He put the book away.

For the rest of that day, he sat on his windy hillside, thinking about what he wanted to do. He thought carefully, slowly. By the end of the day, he still had no ideas. But, munching on crumbs of walnut-free brownies, he knew he would think of something. 

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## THE EXPEDITION

I've stayed too long upon this sunlit coast,  
filling my journal with its architecture,  
charming the ladies at the Governor's ball,  
teaching my marksmanship to the recruits.

I've covered reams of notepaper with calculations:  
imports of Belgian lace, Alsatian wine,  
porcelain from China and lacquers from Japan,  
the latest Mozart, Pasternak, Matisse.

Their duties do not seem outrageous;  
the city even does some manufacture of its own;  
you can hear excellent opera here  
sung by the largely local virtuosi.

My visits to the inland haciendas  
have instructed me upon the politics of manners;  
the fathers are Homeric, leonine;  
the sons are cultured and the daughters captivating.

But I have put it off for far too long.  
The time has come to strike for the interior.  
This strangest of expeditions will need preparation;  
already it is weeks since the last full rains.

There'll be no bearers on this journey.  
I'll leave all instruments behind.  
No tents, no axes, and no cameras,  
no radio, no carrier-pigeons.

For this exploit I must go unaccommodated.  
Of course I'll leave my evening clothes behind,  
my black silk hat, my diamond pin, my tails,  
even the crimson ribbon of my order.

My honors must be those that show upon my body.  
For this time there's no camouflage will serve.  
My khaki shirts, my rifle, my Havanas  
must all be left behind to await return.

This journey to the forest must be naked.  
Those colors I must know touch through the skin;  
the peoples I shall meet won't recognize me  
unless I'm stripped like Jesus when he died.

And I'm not even sure they'll recognize me  
being, after all these years, hardly their own.  
But, more dismaying, will I know them then  
when they come from the trees, feathered and bound with gold?

Among the waterfalls, those screaming apes,  
those ghostly cockatoos so beautiful,  
those orchises, those giant waterlilies,  
shall I go mad and miss the moment of discovery?

I must go naked, that my feet  
may be inoculated by the poison thorns,  
that in the jungle pools I be not cumbered,  
that all the tongues of Europe should fall from my tongue.

Perhaps I am too old for this adventure  
being, as who reminds me not, something distingué,  
but the old thews throb as if I'd taken  
this journey as a boy first turning into man.

And if I go there pure, no diamond  
hidden between the labia and gum,  
no book nor tape-recorder taped to breast or thigh,  
the monster-doors will open, and I'll be let in.

For those appalling fires are my own,  
those snakes and scorpions my ancestors,  
those witches that shake bitter medicine on me  
are my old servants, from before the university.

And when I pass the ordeal of the leopard  
and when the jaguar has let me go by,  
and when the golden lion has obeyed me,  
I'll come to where she waits for me, and know

in her fierce eyes the passion that I lost,  
the secret of my many cowardices,  
the bitter reason for my spites, my littleness,  
my lethargy, and my paralysis,

and by her side I'll see the other one,  
the hero with his arms folded in gold,  
the one I left behind, my enemy,  
and look upon his face, and know my own.

— Frederick Turner

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**KITECADET**  
by Keith Roberts  
art: Vincent Di Fate



*Keith Roberts returns with a sequel to the well-received "Kitemaster," which appeared in our January 1984 issue. Once again we are afforded a glimpse of the strange and disturbing future world of the Kites, and the terrors they guard against.*

*Roberts is the author of the classic Pavane, plus The Furies, The Boat of Fire, The Chalk Giants, The Grain Kings, and many more. He is one of the most highly regarded British writers of science fiction.*

He had been up before first light, as had all the leavemen. Now the long, barrel-vaulted bath-house echoed as usual with the shouts and high jinks of his classmates. He stood at the urinal, naked as the rest; the ritual created in him its usual strange sensation, half floating, half exhilarated. Halten, as ever, was noisily displaying his morning excitement to all and sundry. Something warm splashed his ankle; he swore, would perhaps have lashed out, but the other's mouthing was lost suddenly in the huge banging of the steam pipes. The yelps redoubled; he grabbed for soap, the semester's last issue, ran for the shower stalls. He had no intention of being caught for long behind a giggling, shoving queue.

Despite the brightening days, the big stoves in the barrack blocks had been allowed alight; beside each stood a blank-faced Sector servant, fanning warmth up steadily from the glowing grille. He fetched the spare towel hoarded in his locker, and was hailed. "Hey Raoul, after you. . . !" He grinned and shook his head, already busy. He was proud of his hair; it was long and thick, the colour of dark corn. He snapped at the Centre man, relaxed, preened himself in warmth.

The breakfast hooter took him by surprise; he was barely halfway through. He hesitated, then drew his hair up quickly into the double ponytail that had recently become the rage. Others, he knew, would do the same; on this morning of mornings, such minor affectations were invariably winked at. It looked well, he decided; nonetheless he felt a vague unease. Almost a guilt. He kept a sharp lookout for the omnipresent Halten. On Feast Days, a certain ebullience was likewise tolerated; it was time, he had decided, for the other to receive a small memento of his displeasure, possibly in the form of a well-blackened eye. But the stocky youth averted his gaze, seemed mightily preoccupied with the texture of the limewashed refectory wall. Which Raoul decided was just possibly a point to him.

By zero eight hundred he was through. His uniform, fresh-pressed by the Sector domestics — Base Rats they called them, though never to their faces — felt warm and comfortable; his tunic buttons had been polished till they gleamed. He adjusted the new brassard lovingly; the loop of silver cord, worn over the shoulder, that represents the main trace of a Cody rig. In



strict truth, he had no right to it as yet; he'd done his training flights, all ten of them, but that had been over the flat fields surrounding Base Camp, well behind the lines. He'd missed out on his first Operational; one of the vicious little fevers that stalk the low ground of the Salient had laid him low; but the T.O. in charge of Cadet messes, in most respects a hard and uncompromising man, had shown an unexpected flash of charity. His term's work had been good, and not all Frontier men go strictly by the book. So when the lists of Cadet Flyers had gone up on the noticeboards his name had been with the rest. He drew the new badge gleefully from Stores and laughed at Kil Halten's face, because for some reason the other had been pegged.

One duty remained to be performed, before Leave properly began. He flicked a final time at his boots, hefted his duffel, and presented himself at the office of Warrantman Keaning. He was kept waiting a considerable while; but that was part of the ritual, and accepted. He stood arms folded, staring out across the Base. The sky was bright now, on that mild spring morning; the early sun gleamed on the low lines of barrack blocks, the taller, gaunt shapes of the Kitehangars. G15, biggest of all the stations on the Salient, would be working for the next few days at much reduced capacity; she would still man four Cody rigs though, round the clock.

The Night Observers (Blackbirds they called them, in Base slang) were coming in; he watched with approval the neat handling of the rigs, lifter after lifter sailing down to be detached by the ground crews, hurried into the safety of the great canvas-sided sheds. He'd heard that in the low Gs, up round Streanling way, they didn't even draw a string for shiftchange; the Observers simply swapped places in the basket, and up she went again. He curled his lip. They were all bog-happy up there anyway. At G15 each rig was drawn for checking, every time, and a new trace flown. But G15 was the showplace of the frontier; the best station, he thought privately, in the Corps.

The launch vehicles jetted their plumes of steam, and he touched his arm again. Very soon now, he'd be a full-fledged Flier, one of the *élite*. The thought served to straighten his shoulders fractionally. He was tall, taller by a head than the Salient lads from whom the Corps was mostly staffed; and though Halten had jeered often enough, asking how many extra lifters he'd need for a Force Three Stable, awareness of physical superiority still brought a degree of pleasure.

The opening of the door behind him interrupted the train of thought. He turned, saluted. Warrant Keaning was a grey-haired, seamed-faced man; the longest serving of all the Base personnel, if the tale was true. His eyes flicked, from the habit of a lifetime, over the young Cadet's uniform; finally he seemed to be satisfied. He gestured, briefly; Raoul followed him into the inner sanctum, stood stiffly before the desk.

"At ease," said the other mildly. He took from his uniform a pair of curious half-round glasses, adjusted them on his nose. He said, "Ready for the

off? You'll have a fine day for it."

Raoul suppressed a smile. Expecting some such comment, he'd taken careful note of the telltales on Hangar Six. "Force Three and a half, sir, gusting Four," he said. "Sou-sou west, steady. I'd rather be flying."

"*Hmmph*," said the other. He spread papers on the desk, studied them. He said, "Seen your family recently?"

"No, sir. Not this term."

"I see. You didn't think of travelling up to Hyeway then?"

Raoul swallowed. The thought of the little Northland farmhouse didn't appeal; his mother clattering in the kitchen baking the dry Maycakes, his father sway-backed from the years he'd spent trudging his land, weighed down by the great baskets of grain. "Sower's arse" they called it, and there was no cure. Though they had machine spreaders now for the horse-drawn rigs, there was even talk of investing in an old tractor. A Kitecadet might not earn much, by Middle Land standards; but in the economy of the Salient, the wages he sent home were critical. "I've never been to Middlemarch," he said. "I felt it was too good a chance to miss."

The Warrantman grunted again. "So when will you be thinking of going?"

Raoul opened his mouth, and closed it quickly. The words "First Air Leave" had all but slipped out; but at least he'd avoided the trap. You don't count those sort of chickens, if you're wise; at least not while you're still a Cadet. He said formally, "At the next opportunity, sir." The affair of the brassard rankled with Keaning, he knew; the old man at least was a stickler for regulations. He'd been expecting some sort of grilling; it was a small enough price to pay, though.

It seemed the other still had not finished. "I see you were in line for a Church scholarship once," he said. "What made you change your mind?"

Raoul thought quickly. The Corps paperwork he could handle well enough, the trig, met and all the rest; but theology was another matter. The other knew that well enough, of course; but he wasn't going to make the admission. Not at least till it was forced out of him. He raised his head. "It was my mother's ambition really," he said. "I didn't feel I had a vocation; I thought I might perhaps be more use here."

Keaning stared over his glasses. "Probably just as well," he said. "They don't give too many of those things out. Not in the Salient at least." So the point was made anyway; but he wasn't a long term Warrantman for nothing. He stared at the papers a final time, and shuffled them together. "Very good," he said. "These seem to be in order." He handed them over. Base Pass and ID, security clearances, the little wallet of credits; exchangeable, Raoul knew, at any counting house of the Church Variant. Or at Main Bank, in Middlemarch. He took them, saluted again smartly. The other removed his glasses, tucked them back in his pocket. "Enjoy your leave, Cadet," he said. "And keep your nose clean, won't you? You know what I mean."

The Warrantman sat for a while after the door had closed, staring into space. He was wondering how many boys like that he'd seen come and go now, over the years. He glanced through the long, metal-framed windows at the rigs; bright sails of the lifters steady in the high blue, thin cobweb-lines of traces. He sighed, rubbed his face, and busied himself with other tasks.

The transports were waiting, up by Main Gate; most of the other leave-men and Cadets had already clustered round them. Raoul took deep breaths of suddenly wine-sweet air and resisted the temptation to break into a run. Good enough for a First Year maybe, or one of the Base Rats; but not when you'd got your Trace up. He strode out smartly instead, saluting the Controllers on Three and Four rigs as he passed. Then two pilots soared simultaneously ahead, and he stopped to watch. He'd wondered vaguely why the shiftchange had been delayed; now it became clear. Hangars One and Two were racing, for the benefit of the assembled crowd.

The little kites rose swiftly, dragging their light lines, clawing for altitude; and the singing of the winch gears checked for the addition of the first trace cones. The lifters followed, climbing each to its appointed place as the winches paid out again; in what seemed a startlingly short time the black manlifters were run out from the hangars. The Observers appeared, goggled and helmeted even on that bright day. The handlers stepped back; and the rigs were climbing once more, steadily, into the blue. He stared up, shading his eyes. The pilots were all but invisible now, mere dots against the glowing sky; and still the lines paid out. The traces angled, steadied; altitude bells pealed faintly from the hangars; and the winches were locked at last. The rigs hung, watchful, over the low hills of the Frontier.

Orderly Meggs was jubilant. "Five fifty-two," he said. "Five bloody fifty-two, we cracked six minutes. Beat that, for a Force Three launch . . ." The G15 Cadets cheered lustily; the lads from Twelve and Fourteen, who'd be travelling with them, looked more glum. Raoul smiled. It was a smart enough stringup, certainly; but by the normal standards of the Base, the launchers had been double-manned.

He climbed aboard the first of the gaunt, high-sided vehicles, slung his duffle in the baggage net, and hurried for the back. He was long-legged, the seating centres fixed for Salient personnel; he had no intention of suffering the best part of a day of bruised kneecaps. The rest piled after him, with much pushing and shoving; the old hands grabbed the front compartment, set up a card game almost at once. Meggs checked his clipboard, yelling for quiet; and at last they were away, jolting down the rutted track that led to the first of the ramshackle Salient villages. He stared back at the Base, the kite strings tiny already against the eastern sky. He felt again the rise of an intense pleasure. The pleasure was anticipation. Quite what to expect, he had no idea. But he was looking good, his uniform looked good, and this was his first real furlough.

Two hours later, he was feeling bemused. He'd received an impression,

his first, of the sheer size of the land the Corps protected. The transports shook and clattered, solid tyres bouncing over potholes; and this was still the Salient, the country he'd known from a child. Dotted with little farms, the occasional small hamlet, broken here and there by the low rise of a hill, but for the most part deadly flat. Little traffic either, and few signs of life: just the odd cart, sometimes a peasant leaning at the wayside, scowling suspiciously at the small convoy. Though once they passed through a slightly bigger settlement, nearly large enough, he supposed, to be called a town. In its centre, placed at the crossing of four roads, were the twin buildings he'd come to expect from his odd trips to the Eastguard: the arrogant, thrusting spire of the Church Variant, fronting the whitewashed barn of the milder Middle Doctrine.

His fellow Cadets had fallen quiet as well. Once Halten, typically, had begun to bawl a vulgar ditty; something about how far could you get up, with a fifty-lifter string. Meggs snarled at him finally to shut up, and Raoul was vaguely glad. There was a sombreness about the place that matched his altered mood.

A brief stop, at an inn that looked as decrepit as the rest, and the land finally began to change. They were climbing now, into lush green hills. The road surface was better too; the wheels of the transports crunched on new-laid gravel. This country was prosperous, more prosperous than any he'd seen; there were well-stocked fields, neatly fenced paddocks in which fine horses ran. He essayed a question, and Meggs nodded. "Yes," he said. "It's Middlemarch."

They rounded a bend, and Raoul gasped. Ahead lay the biggest house he'd ever seen. It dominated a treelined coomb: a high stone frontage, embellished with corner towers, set with line on line of elegant windows. Above it, over the steep-pitched roofs, flew massive kite strings. The streamers flapped, gaudy and graceful; on them he made out the cabalistic signs that protected the Realms from harm. The Seeing Eye; the clenched fist of the Church; and the Vestibule, the ancient leaf-shape that forever distracts the attention of the Evil One. He remembered the shock he had received as a small child, when its use and meaning were first explained to him.

Stev Marden called a question; and once again the Orderly was ready with an answer. "Kitemaster," he said, and sniffed.

Raoul pondered. Kitemasters were the high churchmen who controlled the Corps itself, shaped its policies, ran each detail of its daily functioning. Always, to him, they'd been semi-legendary beings; now he understood why, if they lived in palaces fit for kings. But his attention was rapidly distracted. Ahead, and closing fast, was a private transport vehicle, one of the very few he had seen. Its sides were blazoned with the insignia of the Church Variant; so it was bound, perhaps, for the great place they had passed. Beyond it was another, and another; soon the road was dotted with

them. There were more of the fine buildings too, glimpsed briefly; though none, he thought, as grand as the very first of all.

The hills rose steeper now to either side, coated with heather and gorse. At the highest point of all, the rock of which they were formed broke through the grass, showing in weathered outcrops, in rounded domes like the old, patched skulls of giants. A final wheezing climb, and the view ahead abruptly opened out.

Even Halten, it seemed, was momentarily stunned to silence. Far off, the mountains of the Westguard loomed in silhouette, like pale holes knocked in the sky. To right and left, as far as the eye could reach, the land rose to other heights, while below, dwarfed by the vast bowl in which it lay yet still it seemed stretching endlessly, lay Middlemarch, greatest city in all the Realms.

Somebody whooped, and abruptly the spell was broken. The Cadets fell to chattering like magpies as the transports began their slow, cautious descent. Raoul joined in, pointing to this and that wonder: the Middle Lake, the great central parkland where on the morrow the Air Fairs would begin, the pale needle-spires of Godpath, Metropolitan Cathedral of the Variants. The sprawling building beside it, he knew from his books and lectures, was the Corps headquarters; beyond was the Mercy Hospital, the Middle Doctrine's chief establishment. Beyond again loomed other towers, too numerous to count; while in every direction, spreading into distance, were the squares and avenues, the baths and libraries and palaces of that amazing town. To the south, Holand, the industrial suburb, spread a faint, polluting haze; but all the rest was sparkling; clear and white, like a place seen in a dream.

The road, the ribbon of gravel, decreased its slope by slow degrees; perspectives became more normal; Middlemarch sank from sight behind the curtain of its own outlying trees. Half an hour later the transports were bowling along a wide boulevard, fringed with fine houses. From each, for this greatest Festival of the year, flew the strings of sacred kites; and the Orderly prodded Raoul in the ribs. "Nice number, that," he said, nodding. "If you ever get tired of the Codys. Kiteman to one of the Masters; you'd be made for life."

The Cadet dragged his mind back from distance. He was bemused, it seemed, by the giddy whirl of traffic. "Yes," he said. "Yes, I suppose I would." He'd been a million miles from the Base, from the stink of dope in the hangars, the scents of oil and steam, harsh roar of the roof arcs on winter nights of wind. But leave the Codys? The thought was insupportable. The great rigs were his life; they would be his life forever.

They passed the massive pile of the Cathedral, folk thronging its steps already for the pre-Feast service; and the transports swung right, and right again. Then left, beneath a high stone arch. They drew up in a courtyard, windows staring down all round; and the throbbing of the engines stopped

at last. "All right, lads," said Meggs, swinging himself to his feet. "Get your gear together; Reception on the right . . ."

The Hostel was a massive, echoing place; but the room into which he was finally decanted was sufficiently like his old dorm on the Base to make him feel almost at home. The same brown, highly-polished floor; the same identically-spaced beds, each with its blanket cube deposited neatly at the foot; even the same tall, pot-bellied stoves, surrounded by their thin, well-polished rails. He slung his kit down next to Stev Marden and grinned. "Well," he said, "we made it." Suddenly, the words seemed curiously trite; but the other didn't seem to notice. "At least," he said, "we got rid of that little bastard Halten. I can't wait to get out on the town."

Raoul grinned again. "Me too," he said. "Thank Heaven for small mercies." He started laying out his gear.

Passes were issued; but curfew was at twenty-two hundred, Lights Out twenty-two thirty. Stev moaned a little; privately, the other was pleased. The long day, the excitement, had taken more out of him than he'd realized. He was glad to hit the sack; he was asleep almost as soon as his head had touched the pillow.

It seemed he had barely closed his eyes before the reveille hooters were blaring. The Cadets rose, grumbling noisily; but Raoul for one ran to the high windows, stared up anxiously. Light clouds were scudding; but the day was fine.

The Section was herded to Ablutions, then to Early Service. It seemed the chaplain droned on for an age; but at last they were free to leave. A hasty breakfast, an even hastier Dorm Fatigue; and they debouched in threes and fours, onto the city streets.

Middlemarch, that brilliant morning, presented a spectacle Raoul thought he would never forget. The hordes of people, hooting of the flower-decked transporters; here, he decided, must be all the folk in the world. Everywhere, the dark blue of the Corps; and priests in plenty, grey and sage green of the Middle Doctrine, white, black and purple of the Church Variant. Even, here and there, the vivid scarlet of a Master and his aides. There were startling girls too, in robes like of which he'd never seen. They too had decked themselves with flowers; they passed in chattering, laughing groups, down with all the rest. Toward the park, the great Air Fair.

He'd been separated from Stev and the others; but finding his way presented no difficulty. It seemed he was swept along, as by a tide. Within minutes, he saw the place ahead; the tall stands erected for the visiting dignitaries, the hangars that housed the score on score of show strings. Decorative kite trains already flew, outlining the whole ground with spots of vivid colour.

The proceedings were opened by the Grand Master himself, from a dais higher than all the rest. Raoul wasn't near enough to catch the words; he doubted privately, though, if anybody heard much. The cheering was too

intense. The Master raised his arms, in a final blessing; and the first of the launch rigs swept onto the field. A gust of vapour whirled above the crowd; the stink of hot oil mingled with the sweetness of crushed grass. Raoul grinned, in pure excitement; and his arm was caught.

He turned. It was a boy a year or two older than himself, a tall lad in the pale blue of a Middlemarch cadet. He took in the other's uniform, eyes twinkling, glanced at the shoulder tags.

"G15," the boy said. "You're a long way from home. Well, Outlander, have you come to find out how to fly a rig?"

Raoul hesitated; but there was no malice in the words. He grinned again. "I doubt I shall learn very much," he said, and turned back to the field.

Five pilots soared together; within seconds, it seemed, their lifters were airborne too. Privately, he was amazed. He'd seen some fast stringing up, but never anything like that. "There's a trick to it, of course," said the other. "They strip the fairleads, the cones are ready-spaced."

"We wouldn't have that, not where I come from," growled Raoul. "Cable warp on the drums." But the other laughed outright. "New cables," he said. "They're only used the once. No expense spared, in Middlemarch."

The Fliers worked their tail-down tackles; the strings swung dangerously together, lapped somehow each over each. Three hundred feet above, the baskets all but touched; and from them burst a storm of pink and yellow petals. The crowd roared its delight, and Raoul's new friend grabbed his sleeve again. "That's it for half an hour," he said. "Come on, quick. I've got a pal in the cider tent; get a move on, or we shall never get a drink."

It was the start of a hectic, exhilarating week. There were formal tours of the hangar complexes, a banquet for all the Cadets presided over by no less a personage than Kitemaster Helman himself. By accident or design, G15 drew the top table; the preparatory spitting and polishing went on for most of the day. It promised to be a prickly affair, but by the end of the evening Raoul had all but lost his awe. The old man sat beaming happily, surrounded by Variant children in their new Confirmation robes; later he shook hands, it seemed, with everyone in the hall. Meanwhile, the displays went on. Girls in tiny costumes performed feats of aerial daring; Raoul gasped, but only partly at their skill. There was even a demonstration of the new-fangled hydrogen balloons; the city had been buzzing with the news for days. Research had been known to be proceeding, but the Church had hitherto released the slimmest of details. Raoul attended with the rest; he was, however, curiously unimpressed. The silver blimps rose slowly, above the gaggle of gas bowzers; and he shook his head. They would never replace the elegance and flexibility of the Codys.

The Festival reached its climax. On the final afternoon Canwen, senior Flier of the Salient, was to attempt a new height record. Stev was enthusiastic, but Raoul once more pulled a face. A Cody basket at three thousand feet? There'd be no air to breathe, no air at all. He'd seen the rig designed

for the attempt; the traces themselves looked no thicker than a pilot line, even the lifter frames were of some new lightweight alloy. The lifters themselves were massive, twice the span of anything they had at Base. He brooded. There were Fliers and Fliers of course; but there had only ever been, there would only ever be one Canwen.

The day closed with a massed display. Again, he knew he was seeing something he would probably never see again; fifty rigs, all taking to the air at once. He stared up. The lifter strings glowed oddly bright against the clouds growing overhead; the hissing of the wind through the forest of struts was deep in his skull, like a tinnitus. The crowd roared; and from every basket shot trails and loops of fire, white and scarlet and green. Aerial bombs exploded, a cannonade; as if in answer, the heavens finally opened with a downpour. He ran, laughing, with the rest. It was for all the world as if the good Lord had deliberately stayed His hand; that was probably Canwen's doing though. "He's always been like it," puffed a fat priest, jogging at his side. "Born in God's arse pocket . . ."

He realized there were two Festivals in Middlemarch; the second was just beginning. Great bands of folk, young men and girls, pranced through the streets regardless of the deluge; every window blazed; the city's many inns and taverns roared. Tonight, it seemed nobody would sleep.

He tacked from pub to pub, drank cup after cup of the rich yellow wine, juice of the miles of orchards for which the Middle Lands were famed. His pockets jingled with cash, but nowhere would they take his money. For a Kiteman, everything was free. He laughed, his arm round the waist of a serving girl. She swung to peck his cheek; her hair brushed at him; he thought it was her scent that made him giddy.

Where he found the other, he could never afterwards remember. Nor could he recall with clarity whether she first spoke to him, or he to her. She was small and neat and rounded, and her skin was brown; he thought he'd never seen so many freckles. She was barefooted, in the short skirt of a serving maid; but that was all to the good. He admired her slim legs, her sturdy little knees. She curled on his lap, feather-light, in a room where a band played jigs, where waitresses circled between the many tables with more decanters of the vivid wine. She reached up, stroked his hair; he bent his head to kiss. "It must be marvellous," she said. "What's it really like? To be a Flier?"

He pulled a face. Much sooner concentrate on rubbing her behind. "It's all right," he said. He nuzzled at her again; but she chuckled, pushed away.

"Tell me," she said. "I want to know it all. You must have an awful lot to learn. Who teaches you, the Kitecaptains?"

"No," he said, "they'd never . . ." He stopped. To a Kitecaptain, Cadets were the lowest form of life; but it wouldn't do to admit it. "They're usually pretty busy," he said. "So we have special people. We call them T.O's. Training Officers."



She toyed with the brassard on his shoulder. "You've really flown," she said. "Right out across the Frontier. Weren't you very scared?"

He hesitated. He'd have liked to turn the conversation, but there seemed to be no way. "A bit," he said modestly. "But everybody is, of course. The first time."

"The first time," she said. "How many times have you done it then?"

"Oh," he said, "a few."

Her eyes were very big and dark. "Are the Badlands really like they say? Do they really shine at night?"

He checked again, but the lie must be maintained now; he'd gone too far to stop. He launched into a description of a place he'd never seen. He'd heard about it though, often enough; the hills and ridges of that drear expanse, treeless and desolate, stretching as far as the eye could reach, twinkling in darkness with their own blue fire.

"Gosh," she said. "Gosh, you're so brave. I'd never dare . . ." She shivered, deliciously. "And are there people there as well? People like us?"

"There are people," he said. "You don't see much of them as a rule. They're not like us, though."

"What . . . are they like?"

He touched the little curl beside her ear. "You wouldn't want to know."

She glanced up quickly. "Have you ever seen a Demon?"

"Ah," he said. "Now that would be telling."

"No, honestly . . ."

He frowned. "No," he said after a moment. "No, I haven't."

"Some of you have, though."

"Yes," he said. "I expect some of us have."

She frowned in turn. "I've never understood about them," she said. "What do they look like? Really?"

"You know the Litany."

"Yes," she said. "But it's never seemed to make much sense. I mean, it's difficult to believe in them. All that about fishes, flying in the air. And the flames all coming out. Fish can't fly."

He said, "They made the Badlands though." He smiled. "Don't worry, perhaps there aren't any left. But we've still got to be ready. In case they ever come back."

"What would you do? If you saw one?"

He said easily, "Get rid of it, of course."

She looked at him solemnly. "Would it work?" she said. "Just saying words? What do you call it, exorcising . . . Would it really turn round and fly away?"

He made a face. Once more he seemed to be getting out of his depth. He said, "That's what we're there for." He signalled to one of the waitresses. The girl grabbed the cup from him, drank. Wine trickled on her chin, ran down inside her dress. He said, "Messy thing." He kissed her. The sweet-

ness of the drink was on her mouth.

The street door opened, abruptly. "Oh, no," he said. "Oh, no . . ." It seemed he'd been tracked down by his entire Mess. They set up a cheer at sight of him, and Stev Marden called across. "Save some for me . . ."

They crowded round. Halten was drunker than the rest. He crashed against a table, wine was spilled. A Middlemarcher shouted; Stev said anxiously, "Cool it . . ."

The girl had tensed. Halten grabbed for her wrist. She snatched it back, and Raoul said, "That's enough."

"Enough?" said the other thickly. "Wha' y' mean, enough? Wha's she then, private property?" He pawed at her again; she jumped up, eeled away, and Raoul was on his feet. "*I said pack in . . .*"

The other's mood changed instantly. "An' who the Hell are you?" he said. "Jus' who the Hell are you?" He snatched at the brassard. "You don't even have the ri—" He got no further, because Raoul hit him in the mouth.

He was off balance; and the blow had been delivered with all the other's strength. He reeled back, sprawled across two tables. Uproar arose; instantly he was up, arms flailing.

To Raoul, it was as if events were curiously slowed. There was time for regret, even horror, at what he had done; also for fear to grow, because it seemed he was fighting a madman. The air was full of flying fists; his lip split, numbingly; a blow on the cheek sent him crashing against the wall. He all but fell; then suddenly the objects round about seemed oddly tinged with red. He launched himself at his opponent, in a berserk rage.

There was no memory, later, of physical contact; and certainly none of pain. He was aware, dimly, of the blows he rained, of the other's contorted face; then it seemed his sight was wholly swamped. He wrestled with the arms that held him back; and Stev's voice reached him faintly. "For God's sake," he said, "you'll bloody kill him . . ."

His vision cleared, abruptly. Halten had rolled onto his side; he lay whimpering, hands to his reddened face. A dozen separate scuffles had already broken out; and the girl was tugging desperately at his arm. "Quick," she said, "quick. Before the Vars get here . . ."

It registered, dimly. He'd seen the Variant police in action once or twice before. He ran with her, half-leaning. He felt giddy now and sick, disoriented. "Come on," she said, "come on. It isn't far . . ."

The street outside was crowded still. They turned and twisted, desperate; and there was an archway, closed off by iron-studded doors. She pushed at a wicket, ducked through, slammed. He saw treegrown grounds, a drive; beyond, lines of tall lit windows. She turned aside though, to a stable block. "Up here," she said, "up here. You'll be all right . . ."

He negotiated, with difficulty, a steep wooden ladder. Round about was a powerful, sweet scent that in his dazed condition he couldn't place. A match

flared, in the dark; by the light of the lamp she lit he saw they were in a hay-loft. He sat down, shakily. His cheek was stinging now; he put his fingers to it. They came away red. He stared at them, surprised.

"It's all right," she said again. "It isn't much. I'll get some things." She swung quickly down the ladder.

She was back in minutes with a bowl and cloths, a towel. She knelt beside him, wiping gently. She said, "He caught you an awful whack," and he said dully, "I nearly killed him, didn't I?" She paused then in what she was doing. She said, "I wish you had." She finished finally, sat back. "There," she said, "it's not too bad at all. How do you feel?"

"Fine," he said. "I'm all right now, honestly."

She drew her knees up, linked her arms round them. In the dim light, her eyes were unfathomable. He watched back; and suddenly he knew why he was there, what the end of it must be. His heart gave a great leap and bound; like the surge of a Cody basket almost, caught in a squall.

She saw he'd understood; she rose, unhurriedly, undid her frock and let it fall. He thought he'd never seen anything as beautiful. She knelt before him again, began to work at his tunic. He licked his lips, and when his voice came it was little more than a croak. He said, "What about the others?" and she smiled. "They'll be out all night," she said serenely. "Nobody will come here." She pressed her mouth to his, twined fingers behind his neck. He tasted salt again, and didn't care.

It was over far too quickly, the first time. "Sorry," he said, "I did not mean . . ." But she merely chuckled. "You should have played with me first," she said. "Don't worry, it'll be better soon." Later, he fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

She roused him at first light. He was disoriented for a moment; then memory returned. He lay blinking sleepily. He said, "I've been to Heaven," and she smiled. She said, "Where's Heaven?" and he said, "Between your legs."

Zero nine thirty was Departure Time. Walking back through the city, he had leisure to feel scared. He needn't have worried, though. Most of the Mess had failed to make the previous night's curfew; they were still staggering in, in bedraggled twos and threes. It was well after ten hundred before they finally got on the road.

Stev greeted him enthusiastically. It seemed he'd had quite a night as well. One eye was decorated in festive green and purple, and there was an angry-looking weal across his forehead. That was nothing, though, or so he proclaimed. "You should just see Halten, K.," he said. "We really ought to get a picture. Before the swelling goes."

Raoul said nervously, "Is he . . . was he badly hurt?" But the other shook his head. "Take more than that to kill the little bastard," he said. "More's the pity . . ." He nodded at the broken brassard. "Anyway, that's a Charge to

start with. If you wanted to make it stick. And we'd all back you . . ."

Raoul was silent, while the transports ground through the city. As they climbed the long road to the hills, he found himself staring back. Middlemarch lay as he had seen it first, basking in mild sunlight, but infinitely, secretly, more lovely now. He touched his tunic pocket, where he'd tucked the trinket she'd given him. In it a scrap of paper, with her name and Post-code, and a tiny curl of hair.

"What's that?" he said. "I'm sorry," and Meggs laughed. "I know what's wrong with him," he said. "He found himself a groupie. What was she, Landy Street? They mostly hang out there. Work in the big houses." He dug Raoul in the ribs. "First one was it, youngster?" He grinned. "Nothing like the first time, eh? Nearly makes me wish I was your age again . . ."

Raoul smiled. For a moment, there'd been a flash of rage; but it was quickly gone. In its place was almost a species of compassion. Because the other had got it so wrong; nobody could know what he had known, or share. He lay back, felt himself sliding toward sleep; and the transports turned due east, to the high and glowing pass.

He opened his eyes. The city still stretched into haze; the sun still shone, but lacking now in warmth. The land was altered, subtly; the leaves of trees hung still and golden, or stirred uneasy in the puffs of western wind, harbingers of the first gales. Bad weather, for the Kitemen; soon, winter would be here.

He stared round the transport. No faces he knew, this trip; not a single one. Secretly, he was glad. He'd no desire to chatter; too much was still going on, in his mind.

He checked in at the Hostel. He thought they looked at him a little oddly. He shouldn't be here, of course; he should have been in the Northlands. But that was his affair, not theirs.

He walked to Middle Park. The place was deserted, in the early dusk. The stands still stood, skeletally. From one hung tatters of cloth: fragments of banners that had flown there, half a life ago.

The lamplighters were about, when he got back to town centre, tramping the streets, giving their high, yodelling cries. He tipped one, absently, and found himself a bar. A woman came to him, and smiled. He looked at her, and she went away.

The city quietened, by degrees. At twenty-two hundred, he paid up and left. He walked to Landy Street. He found the remembered archway; beyond it, strands of some creeper swayed from the high wall. He tapped the wicket, softly, and it opened. She drew him inside quickly, kissed him with all her body. She said, "I didn't think you'd come. I didn't think I'd ever see you again." He stroked her hair, smelling the fragrance of her. He said, "I promised."

No lights showing, from the big house; the shadows by the stable block

were velvet-dark. She took his hand. "Careful," she said. "There's a step there. And another."

She lit the lamp, stood looking at him. The place seemed oddly cold. She said, "You've grown, Raoul." He shook his head. She smiled a little quirky smile. She said, "A bit different from last time." He said, "Yes."

She took his hands. Her eyes were troubled. Dark. She said, "Have you eaten? I could get you something." But he shook his head again. He said, "It's all right."

"Raoul," she said, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said. "It's nothing."

She was still unsure. She stared up again, eyes moving in little shifts and changes of direction. She said, "Do you still want me?" and suddenly his own eyes stung.

"You don't know how much," he said. "God, you don't know how much."

He clung to her; and she drew him down, into the hay. She said, "Undress me."

He felt self-conscious, walking for the first time in a Flier's stiff red cloak. Stev Marden drew it from him, face carefully expressionless; though as he stooped to lay the thing aside he took the chance to mutter, "Good luck, Raoul."

He stared round the field. He'd been up two hours or more, but he still felt curiously lightheaded. It took a moment for details to sink in. There was the launcher, of course, with its battered, maroon-painted sides, streaked here and there with rust; beside it stood Warrant Keaning and both Adjutants. A little farther back was Captain Goldensoul himself, hands as ever clasped behind him, feet a little apart on the tarmac of the apron. That was an honour he certainly hadn't expected.

He squared his shoulders consciously, stepped out. Zero eight hundred, on a fine June morning; and the rig already streamed of course, angled up steady into the blue. He saw they'd flown five lifters, so Halten's jibe had in part come true. Halten himself, pilot-rigger for the day, stared down from the top of the high truck. His face was as inscrutable as the rest.

The Launchmaster nodded curtly. "Your Uptime will be one hour," he said. "You shouldn't have any problems. Wind's Three, gusting Four; stable barometer." Raoul nodded in turn. He said, "Thank you, sir."

The manlifter rocked slightly, restrained still by a half a dozen Cadets. He climbed into the creaking wicker basket, checked his pistol, the breviary he carried, checked the angle of the tail gear. He remembered at the last instant to turn, salute the Base Commander. Goldensoul acknowledged, it seemed absently; and the Launchmaster snapped, "Clear rig . . ."

As ever, there was no sensation of leaving the ground. The briefest of bumps, a lurching of the cradle; and he was rising smoothly, drawn behind the immense string of kites. He stared back, and down. Already, the hangar

roofs had changed perspective; the big numbers painted on them showed clear, white against corrugated grey. The group round the launcher had spread out, foreshortened on the grass. The peri fence slid underneath, swayed gently as he gained in altitude; ahead lay the border, the low hills of the Badlands.

At three hundred feet he primed the pistol, slipped the copper cap over the nipple. He checked his harness, the snap-releases that held him to the basket. The rule had only just come in, he'd heard a lot of the older fliers wouldn't use them. He tugged them anyway, conscientiously. Because rules are rules, they're there to be obeyed. And this was his first Op.

The wind was keen already, slicing at him; he was glad of the protection of the leather suit. "The Breath of God" they called it, in those endless early Sermons. On the ground, the words seemed trite; up here though, as ever, they made sense. He marvelled, as he had marvelled before, at the sheer silent power of a Cody rig. He peered up at the string. The trace snaked, gracefully, gave him a glimpse of his first lifter; beyond, the vivid dot that was the pilot. The wind-flaw caught the basket; he lost altitude, worked at the tail-down tackle. The train steadied again.

He guessed he was at operational height. Downstairs the hangar bells would be pealing, the Launchmaster setting the safeties on the big winch. He looked back, to the grey rectangles of sheds. Westward, the land stretched into haze. Somewhere beyond the bright horizon lay Middlemarch. He stared straight down. High though he was, the low, humped bushes showed clear; it seemed he could have numbered the individual blades of grass.

There was a ringing snap. The thrill lashed back through the train; instantly the rig began to snake again, more wildly than before. He stared up, appalled. He had lost his pilot.

The Cody was now hopelessly unbalanced. The basket dipped sickeningly, soared; he grabbed for the main trace, felt the vibration of the winch. Below, he knew, binoculars would have been trained; they'd have seen, at the same instant. A lifter boomed and flapped; at once, the line tension eased. Somewhere, a deadly calculation was going on. Too slow, and his lift was gone; too fast, and they'd crack a strut. Then he'd be gone for good.

He glared back at the boundary fence; the long thin line of it, stretching into distance. So near, and yet so far. Then there was time, it seemed, for one strange thought. He remembered Halten's face, the lack of expression there. One slip, a badly-adjusted tackle; but accident or design, it made no difference now. Halten was through. He stared at the fence again, regauged his height. He'd realized he had more pressing problems; he'd just received an aerial lesson in trigonometry.

The basket struck, rebounded. Had it not been for the harness, he'd have been thrown out, onto the sick grass of the Badlands. He worked the tail-down tackle; and the wind gusted suddenly. It made him another hundred

yards; but the fence looked as far away as ever.

The shouts carried to him. "*The basket, the basket . . .*" He understood, at last; it was tilted to one side, carrying far too much weight. He grabbed the pistol from its wicker holster, but he was too late: the thing that had boarded him already had his wrist. It was no bigger, perhaps, than a three- or four-year child, and its skin was an odd, almost translucent blue. It was mature though, evidently; he saw that it was female. Dreadfully, appallingly female.

The gun went off, wildly; then it was jerked from his hand. The basket rebounded again; but the other didn't relax its grip. He stared, in terror. What he saw now in the eyes was not the hate he'd read about, but love: a horrifying, eternal love. She stroked his arm, and gurgled; gurgled and pleaded, even while he took the line axe, and struck, and struck, and struck . . .

He flung the girl away from him. She fell back, panting, in the hay. "Raoul," she said, "what is it? What have I done . . ." He couldn't answer, though; he was grabbing for his clothes. He ran, for the tall ladder; and she screamed again. "Raoul, no . . . no, please . . ."

The city was round about him. He ran again, through Landy Street, into Main Drag, past the huge bulk of Godpath. The middle park was ahead; his breath was labouring, lungs burning, but he knew he would never stop now. "I'm sorry," he screamed, to the sky that didn't care "*I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry . . .*"

## FOR THOSE WHO LOVE DANGER

The hearth will travel, the pad will stay,  
The moonlight will your lovers fail,  
No Beaker folk on Ganymede,  
No menhir and no trilithon  
Will cast the slightest gaze on you  
Who go among the stars.

Your children, like the farmer's crops,  
Will take new soil somewhere else.  
Though stars will fail, or grow too hot,  
Your reach will still outreach your thought,  
So always leave the roving hearth  
To those in love with danger.

— John Devin

# Screen Reviews

by Baird Searles

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## Ban the Buck

Buckaroo calls to mind the classic macho image of Western America, the cowboy. Banzai is a Japanese battle cry (paradoxically meaning "May you live ten thousand years" — presumably not addressed to the enemy), equally macho in its image. The leading character of *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* is half-American, half-Japanese, and we're obviously supposed to draw some inferences from his name. He is also a brilliant neurosurgeon, atomic physicist, and rock star (one can only, for the patients' sake, hope the surgery is more apt than the music, from what we hear).

Now all this is the basis of what was hoped to be a madcap, rollicking spoof, with one foot firmly in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and the other in any number of comics (with a third foot groping in the direction of Doc Savage). Trouble is that the movie's a mess; there's no style (*Raiders*, whatever you thought of it, had a style). Or maybe mess *is* the style, since it's consistent in the script, action, and look.

No point in detailing the plot. Leave it at this: some aliens from Planet Ten have exiled some socially undesirable Tenants (what else can you call them?) to the 8th . . . or maybe the Chorp Dimension, and BB messes up the status quo by going through a solid mountain with his new invention, thereby penetrating the 8th Dimension and letting loose said undesirables, who are aided and abetted by a Mad

Doctor type here on Earth.

From there on, everything is pell and mell, with chases, ambushes, captures, and various vehicles from Planet Ten and BB's double-decker van (in which he travels with a lab and rock group, the Hong Kong Cavaliers, who act as multiple sidekicks) whooshing around, usually, it would seem, in circles.

*Everything* is very messy, and what's annoying is that some good jokes get buried *in* the mess, both visual and aural. At least one of the scriptwriters and one of the designers seem to have had some intelligent, funny ideas going, but it's as if ten others in each category had to pile up *their* stuff on top of it. The visual chaos of the alien's laboratory distracts from the large white objects in the corner which look like a giant set of symmetrical teeth; one doesn't even have time to notice them. It's a relief to see the aliens' ship, which *has* to be more or less by itself on the screen, and really *is* funny; it looks like a flying system of caves.

In the same way, nice bits of dialogue are thrown away or lost because it's all in such a hurry. And even some good plot ideas are nearly jettisoned; there's a marvelous one about the aliens using Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* broadcast to cover up their *real* "invasion" of New Jersey in 1939, where they all settled and took out Social Security cards on which the first name is in all cases John.

Even the admirable actor, John



Lithgow (memorable in the final segment of the *Twilight Zone* movie), overdoes the mad scientist number — instead of funny, it's just frenetic, and a little embarrassing.

It's too bad there wasn't anybody around who knew how to make (or at least pace) movies — there was the germ of a good idea here.

### **Terminator Illness**

IT CAME FROM *THRILLING WONDER STORIES* — or at least the idea could have. A perfectly valid SF plot concept that might have formed the basis for a really good genre novel from the 1940s is used in *Terminator*, again proving that film SF is usually decades behind written SF.

Zap, crackle, pop! Two nude men arrive, in a conspicuous display of electrical discharge (and buns), in two different spots in nighttime Los Angeles. One starts methodically (from the phonebook) killing every woman named Sarah Conner in town. The other finds a particular Sarah Conner just in time to save *her* from being wiped out, and as they flee, he explains that:

In the year 2029 there has been a nuclear war, but rather than nation against nation, it had been brought on by self-aware computer systems in an effort to wipe out mankind. The survivors are hunted down by the machine culture which has developed, but a charismatic leader has nearly succeeded in turning the tide for humanity. His name is John Conner. In a last ditch effort, the computers have sent back in time a cyborg killer, a "terminator," to eliminate the leader's mother before he is conceived. Conner, in turn, has captured the time travel equipment and sent back a human, Reese, to save her.

A fairly classic plot, which in a

1940s novel would almost surely have been an intellectual cat-and-mouse game, with the two antagonists from the future using their foreknowledge, but inevitably running into unexpected problems in a world of a half-century before their time.

But it's the 1980s, and this is a movie. So forget the subtleties — *any* subtleties. The movie consists of car chases, punctuated with massacres. There are four car chases: car → car; then car → police car; then car → motorcycle; finally semi truck → pedestrian. In between these, for variety, the Terminator bursts into places (discos, motel rooms, police stations) and sprays the area with bullets, not endearing himself to anybody in the immediate vicinity.

It is terribly unkind, I know, to name the actor who plays the Terminator, since he can't seem to manage bullet-spraying with any amount of skill, much less the minimal dialogue. But the Terminator is played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. At one point, his fleshly outer skin (there's acres of it) is burnt off, and he returns to "life" as a gleaming mechanical skeleton (special effects department), which does a better acting job.

Somehow *Buckaroo Banzai* looked a tad better after *Terminator*. At least there was some wit and style buried beneath the mess. There's nothing buried beneath *Terminator* but Schwarzenegger's animated chromium skeleton.

### **Uncrass Commercialism**

As of when I write, it's a sad television season. Not even an imitation "Star Trek" or a cutesy fantasy series featuring genies or a sex-happy ghost. (There *was* one angel, but one must draw the line somewhere; endearing angels went out with *It's a Wonderful*

Life — or before it, so far as I'm concerned.) There was, of course, "V." As I said, it's a sad television season.

So what saved it? A commercial, that's what. British Airways followed up last year's glorious New York in flight (as in *Cities In Flight*) commercial with another, less awe-inspiring, but equally inventive. This one has two space-suited astronauts playing a round of golf on the moon, missing their shuttle, and going to the nearest BA ticket office, which has as many varied customers as the Cantina in *Star Wars*.

It was made, as was the first, by Saatchi and Saatchi, to whom all credit. There will be a third BA space epic; finally something to look forward to on the little screen.

## VIDEO

*Iceman* (MCA) — have you noticed in the last five years or so the tendency to take old B-movie horror themes and redo them with *great* seriousness? *Altered States*, for instance, was just our old friend Jekyll & Hyde gentrified. *Iceman* is the prehistoric thingie revived (*Trog*, *Horror Express*, etc.). It's given a very dignified production which attempts to seriously answer the question: Can a frozen prehistoric man find happiness in the modern world if thawed? It's not dumb (the movie, that is, but neither is the thawee), though it fudges some scientific questions: the word Neanderthal is used but the old chap is obviously early *homo sapiens*; and they can't quite seem to settle on whether it's been 10, 15, or 20 thousand years he's been in the freezer. The problem is that it's all pretty undramatic, and eventually downright dull, despite the attempt to introduce some conflict as the humanist anthropologist and the exploitative (female) medico fight it out as to what to do

with Charlie (the name they've saddled the poor guy with). And there's another one of those ambiguous, non-resolving endings that give the impression that the writers had no idea what to do with the situation they'd set up.

*Strange Invaders* (Vestron) — I would say run, don't walk, to your local video vendor to get this one; but not everyone is going to tune into this modest, outrageous, charming, silly, and subtle movie. The Person With Whom I See Movies, usually of sound taste, hadn't the vaguest as to what I saw in it. It begins as an *homage* to the fifties school of paranoia film, with a flying saucer landing in Centerville, IL, menacing misshapen shadows on the wall, and the usual teen couple in the hot rod. We skip to 25 years later and a professor at Columbia U., lately divorced from a lady from the same Centerville. He finds himself in Centerville searching for her, after she has dumped their daughter on him and gone home. The town is real creepy — so are the inhabitants — and after a bug-eyed monster zaps his car, he hotfoots back to New York where nobody, of course, believes him. No one, that is, except for the woman reporter on *The National Informer* who has made up a story around a ten-year-old photograph of an alien and finds herself being chased around by some weird types (one of whom tries to gain access to her apartment by passing herself off as an Avon representative [cosmetics, not publisher]; typical of the movie's low-keyed silliness). The two of them tangle with a governmental "flying saucer" expert, who explains that yes, indeed, Centerville is occupied by aliens, top secret ("They took your story seriously; they don't know what a rag you write for."), and head back to IL. to get the prof's

daughter, whom the aliens have kidnapped. Find out what happens for yourself.

The movie is all style — not high style, but sort of off-the-wall style. The expected things happen in all the right places, the unexpected things take you by surprise, I laughed a lot, and there's a sappy kind of innocence to it like those old movies. Note the odd look of it, too; everything (including the out-of-door daylight scenes) has the peculiarly vivid quality of having been photographed under sodium vapor lamps. In short, I can't tell whether *Strange Invaders* is being absolutely outrageous in a very straightforward fashion, or absolutely straightforward in a very outrageous fashion.

And two great classics of screen fantasy have become available (I am still bemused at actually being able to own the great films, rather than waiting for them to show up at the local revival house or on TV):

*La Belle et la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast) (Video Dimensions) in the brilliant 1940s film treatment by Jean Cocteau of the ageless tale. Readers may remember a burst of anger in this space a few months ago, occasioned by the *Fairie Tale Theatre* version, which imitated the Cocteau slavishly while giving no credit whatsoever. Now, if you have not seen the great original,

by all means do so. Here a fairy tale is told with all seriousness; there are no concessions to cuteness, no banal songs, no Disneyesque childishness. The additions are all inventive details, which quite simply evoke magic. Perhaps my favorite is the soot-blackened human face set into the baroque fireplace, whose eyes silently follow the interplay between Belle and La Bête.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Key) is a 1934 extravaganza from Hollywood that tarted up Shakespeare in a way that gave the purists severe cases of dyspepsia. Not the least of its peculiarities is the cast, which includes Olivia de Havilland, Dick Powell, Joe E. Brown, James Cagney as Bottom, and a pre-teen Mickey Rooney giving a manic, tour-de-force performance as Puck.

Again the inventive details make it, from Hippolyta's snake-girdled Elizabethan gown to the long sequence of the entrance of the fairies, which is the ultimate in 1930s art deco fantasy (Titania's tresses seem to be made of cellophane), set to Mendelssohn. This ends with a memorable shot, of the fairy horde circling a great oak in an airborne spiral that continues into the sky; all one can say is "Wow! They don't make movies like that any more."

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**DUKE PASQUALE'S RING**  
by Avram Davidson  
art: George Barr



*If not a catalyst for uncanny events, Dr. Engelbert Eszterhazy is, at any rate, a nexus. His country lies east of Vienna and west of Istanbul; we have begun to wonder how many colors would be needed for its map.*

*His adventures, both earlier and later, have been chronicled in a book, The Enquiries of Doctor Eszterhazy (Warner, 1975) and in two novellas in these pages.*

The King of the Single Sicily was eating pasta in a sidewalk restaurant; not in Palermo: in Bella. He had not always been known by that title. In Bella, capital of the Triune Monarchy of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, he had for long decades been known chiefly as an eccentric but quite harmless fellow who possessed many quarterings of nobility and nothing in the shape of money at all. But when the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Naples and all of southern Italy being the other one) was rather suddenly included into the new and united Kingdom of Italy, ostensibly by plebiscite and certainly by force of Garibaldean arms, something had happened to the inoffensive old man.

He now put down his fork and belched politely. The waiter-cook-proprietor came forward. "Could the King eat more?" he asked.

"Im[belch]possible. There is no place." He patted the middle-front of his second-best cloak.

"What damage," said the other. His previous career, prior to deserting a French man-of-war, had been that of coal-heaver. But he was a Frenchman born (that is, he was born in Algeria of Corsican parentage), and this was almost universally held to endow him with an ability to cook anything anywhere in Infidel Parts better than the infidel inhabitants could. And certainly he cooked pasta better and cheaper than it was cooked in any other cook-shop in Bella's South Ward. "What damage," he repeated. "There is more in the pot." And he raised his brigand brows.

"Ah well. Put it in my kerchief, and I shall give it to my cat."

"Would the King also like a small bone for his dog?"

"Voluntarily."

He had no cat; he had no dog; he had at home an old, odd wife who had never appeared in public since the demise of her last silk gown. The bone and extra pasta would make a soup, and she would eat.

With the extinction of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies something had gone flash in the old man's brain-pan: surely Sicily itself now reverted to the status of a kingdom by itself? Surely he was its rightful king? And to anyone who would listen and to anyone who would read, he explained the matter, in full genealogy, with peculiar emphasis on the four marriages of someone called Pasquale III, from one of which marriages he himself descended. Some listened. Some read. Some even replied. But, actually, nothing hap-

pened. The new King of Italy did not so much as restore a long-forfeited tomato-patch. The ousted King of Naples did not so much as reply. Neither did Don Amadeo, King of Spain (briefly, very briefly, King of Spain). On the other hand, Don Carlos, King of Spain (pretended or claimed), did. Don Carlos was an exile in Bella at the moment. Don Carlos perhaps heard something. Don Carlos perhaps did not know much about Pasquale III, but Don Carlos knew about being a pretender and an exile. He did not precisely send a written reply; he sent some stockings, some shirts, a pair of trousers, and a cloak. All mended. But all clean. And a small hamper of luncheon.

By the time the King of the Single Sicily had dressed in his best and gone to call on Don Carlos, Don Carlos was gone, and — to Bella, as to Spain — Don Carlos never came back.

That was the nearest which Cosimo Damiano (as he chose to style himself) had ever come to Recognition. Stockings, shirts, and trousers had all worn out; the cloak he was wearing even now. And to pay for the daily plate of pasta he was left to his semi-occasional pupil in the study of Italian, calligraphy, and/or advanced geometry.

"To see again," he said, now rising, and setting upon the tiny table a coin of two copperkas.

"To see again," said the cook-shop man, his eyes having ascertained the existence of the coin and its value. He bowed. He would when speaking to Cosimo Damiano refer to him in the third person as the king, he would give him extra pasta past its prime, he would even donate to a pretense-dog a bone which still had some boiling left in it. He might from time to time do more. A half-cup of salad neglected by a previous diner. A recommendation to a possible pupil. Even now and then a glass of thin wine not yet "turned." But for all and for any of this, he must have his coin of two copperkas. Otherwise: nothing. So it was.

D. Cosimo D., as sometimes he signed himself, stooped off homeward in his cloak. Today was a rich day: extra pasta, a soup-bone, and he had a half-a-copperka to spare. He might get himself a snuff of inferior tobacco wrapped in a screw of newspaper. But he rather thought he might invest the two farthings in the merchandise of Mother Whiskers, who sold broken nut-meats in the mouth of an alley not far off. His queen was fond of that. The gaunt and scabby walls, street-level walls long since knocked bare of plaster or stucco, narrowed in towards him as he went. The old woman was talking to another customer, not one who wanted a farthingworth of broken nut-meats, by his look. But Mother Whiskers had another profession: she was by way of being a witch, and all sorts of people came to see her, deep in the smelly slums where she had her seat.

She stopped whatever she had been saying, and jerked up her head to D. Cosimo D. "Gitcherself anointed?" was her curious question.

"I fear not. Alas," said D. Cosimo D., with a sigh.

She shook her head so that her whiskers flew about her face, and her ear-

rings, too. "Gitcherself anointed!" she said. "All kinds o' work and jobs I c'n git fer a 'nointed king. Touch fer the king's evil — the scrofuly, that is — everybuddy knows that — and ringworm! Oh my lordy, how much ringworm there be in the South Ward!" Oft-times, when he was not thinking of his own problems alone, Cosimo wondered that there was not much more cholera, pest, and leprosy in the South Ward. "— and the best folks c'n do is git some seventh son of a seventh son; now, not that I mean that ain't good. But can't compare to a 'nointed king!"

And the stranger, in a deep, murmurous voice, said No, indeed.

Poor Cosimo! Had he had to choose between Anointing without Crowning, and Crowning without Anointing, he would have chosen the Holy Oil over the Sacred Crown. But he was allowed no choice. Hierarch after hierarch had declined to perform such services, or even service, for him. There was one exception. Someone, himself perhaps a pretender and certainly an exile, someone calling himself perhaps Reverend and Venerable Archimandrite of Petra and Simbirsk had offered to perform . . . but for a price . . . a high one . . . it would demean his sacred office to do it on the cheap, said he. And, placing his forefinger alongside his nose, had winked.

Much that had helped.

"Well, if you won't, you won't," grumbled Old Mother Whiskers. "But I do my best for y', anyway. Gotchy a stoo-dent, here. See?"

Taking a rather closer look than he had taken before, Cosimo saw someone rather tall and rather richly dressed . . . not alone for the South Ward, richly . . . for anywhere, richly. There was something in this one's appearance for which the word sleek seemed appropriate, from his hat and his moustache down to his highly-polished shoes; the man murmured the words, "Melanchthon Mudge," and held out his hand. He did not take his glove off (it was a sleek glove), and Cosimo, as he shook hands and murmured his own name, felt several rings . . . and felt that they were rings with rather large stones, and . . .

"Mr. Mudge," said Mother Whiskers; "Mr. Mudge is a real classy gent." And D. Cosimo D. felt, also that — though Mr. Mudge may have been a gent — Mr. Mudge was not really a gentleman. But as to that, in this matter: no matter.

"Does Mr. Mudge desire to be instructed," he asked, "in Italian? In calligraphy? Or in advanced geometry? Or in all three?"

Mr. Mudge touched a glossy-leather-encased-finger to a glossy moustache. Said he thought, "For the present, sir. For the present," that they would skip calligraphy. "Madame here has already told me of your terms, I find them reasonable, and I would only wish to ask if you might care to mention . . . by way of, as it were, general reference . . . the names of some of your past pupils. If you would not mind."

*Mind?* The poor old King of the Single Sicily would not have minded standing on his head if it would have helped bring him a pupil. He men-





tioned the names of a surveyor now middling-high in the Royal and Imperial Highways and to whom he had taught advanced geometry, of several ladies of quality to whom he had taught Italian, and of a private docent whom he had instructed in calligraphy: still Mr. Mudge waited, as one who would hear more; D. Cosimo D. went on to say, "And, of course, that young Eszterhazy, Doctor as he now is —"

"Ah," said Mr. Melanchthon Mudge, stroking his moustache and his side-whiskers; "that young Eszterhazy, Doctor as he now is." His voice seemed to grow very drawn-out and deep.

Plaster and paint, turpentine and linseed oil had all alike long since dried, inside and outside the house at Number 33 Turkling Street, where lived Dr. Engelbert Eszterhazy; though sometimes he had the notion that he could still smell it. At the moment, though, what he chiefly smelled came from his well-fitted chemical laboratory, as well as from the more distant kitchen where — in some matters Eszterhazy was old-fashioned — Mrash, his man-cook, reigned. Old Mrash would probably and eventually be replaced by a woman. In the meanwhile he had his stable repertory of ten or twelve French dishes as passed down through generations of army officers' cooks since the days of (at least) Bonaparte; and when he had run through it and them and before running through them and it again, Mrash usually gave his master a few days of peasant cooking which boxed the culinary compass of the fourth-largest empire in Europe. Ox-cheek and eggs. Beef palate, pigs' ears, and buckwheat. Potatoes boiled yellow in chicken broth with unborn eggs and dill. Cowfoot stew, with mushrooms and mashed turnips. And after that it was back to *boeuf à la mode Bayonne* [sic], and all the rest of it as taught long ago to his captors by some long ago prisoner-of-war.

Today, along with the harmless game of "consulting the menu-book," Mrash had a question, "if it pleased his lordship." Eszterhazy knew that it pleased Mrash to think that he cooked for a lordship, and had ceased trying to convince him of it not really pertaining. So, "Yes, Mrashko, certainly. What is the question?" There might or might not be a direct answer.

"What do they call that there place, my lordship, a boo?"

Philologists have much informed the world that the human mouth is capable of producing only a certain limited number of sounds, therefore it was perhaps no great feat for Eszterhazy at once to counter-ask, "Do you

perhaps mean a zoo?"

"Ah," said Mrash the man-cook, noncommittally, He might, his tone indicated, though then again he might not.

Eszterhazy pressed on. "That's the short name for the Royal and Imperial Botanical and Zoölogical Gardens and Park, where the plants and creatures mostly from foreign parts are." Mrashko's mouth moved and seemed to relish the longer form of the name. "It's the second turning of the New Stone-paved Road after Big Ludo's Beer Garden," added 'his lordship.'

Mrash nodded. "I expect that's where it come from, then," he said.

"'Come from'? Where *what* came from, Cooky?"

Cooky said, simply, "The tiger."

Eszterhazy recalled the comment of Old Captain Slotz, someone who had achieved much success in obtaining both civil and military intelligence. Captain Slotz had stated, "I don't ask them did they done it or I don't ask them did they not done it. Just, I look at them, and I say, *Tell me about it.*"

"Tell me about it, Mrashko-Cooky."

The man-cook gestured. "See, my lordship, it come up the lane there," gesture indicated the alley. "And it hop onto yon wood-shed, or as it might be, coal-shed. Then it lep up onto the short brick bake-building. Then it give a big jump and gits onto the roof of what was old Baron Johan's town-house what his widow live in now all alone saving old Helen, old Hugo, and old Hercules what they call him, who look after her ladyship what she seldom go out at all anymore," Eszterhazy listened with great patience; "and then it climb up the roof and until it reach the roof-peak. It look all around. It put its front-limbs down," Mrash imitated this, "and it sort of just stretch . . . *streettch.* . . ."

Silence.

"And then?"

"Then I git back to me work, me lordship."

"Oh."

"Nother thing. I knew that there beast have another name to 't. Leopard. That be its other name. I suppose it come from the boo. I suppose it trained to go back. Three nights I've seen it, nor I haven't heard no alarm." He began making the quasi-military movements which indicated he was about to begin the beginning of his leaving.

"Does it have stripes? Or spots?"

Mrash, jerking his arms, moving stiff-legged, murmured something about there being but the one gas-lamp in the whole alley, there having been not much of a bright moon of recent, hoped the creature wouldn't hurt no one nor even skeer the old Baroness nor old Helen; and — finally — "Beg permission to return to duty, your lordship. *Hup!*"

"Granted. — And — Mrash! [Me lord!] The next time you see it, let me know, directly."

The parade-ground manner of the man-cook's departure gave more than a

hint that the next meal would consist largely of boiled bully-beef in the mode of the Royal and Imperial Infantry, plus the broth thereof, plus fresh-grated horseradish which would remove the roof of your mouth, plus potatoes prepared purple in a manner known chiefly to army cooks present and past all round the world. Eszterhazy looked out the window and across the alley. At ground level, the stones of the house opposite were immense, seemingly set without mortar. *Cyclopean*, the word came to him. Above these massive courses began others, of smaller pieces of masonry. The last storey and a half were of brick, with here and there a tuft of moss instead of mortar. The steep-pitched roof was of dull grey slate. And though he could see this all quite clearly, he could see no explanation for the story which his old cook, never before given to riotous fancy, had just recounted to him. Long he stared. Long he stared. Long he considered. Then he rang the bell and asked for his horse to be saddled.

The old Chair of Natural Philosophy had finally been subdivided, and the new Chair of Natural History been created. Natural Philosophy included Chemistry, Physics, Meteorology, Astronomy. Natural History included Zoölogy, Ichthyology, Botany, Biology. Dr. Eszterhazy, having bethought him of the knot of loafers always waiting on hand near the Zoo to see whose horse shied at the strange odor when the wind blew so, decided to stop off first at the office of the Royal-Imperial Professor of Natural History, who was *ex cathedra* the Director of the Royal and Imperial Botanical and Zoölogical Gardens and Park. Said, "Your tigers and leopards. Tell me about them."

The Professor — it was Cornelius Crumholtss, with whom Dr E.E. had once taken private lessons — said, crisply, "None."

"What's that?"

"The tiger died last year. The Gaekwar of Oont, or is it his heir, the Oontie Ghook? has agreed to trade us a tiger for three dancing bears and two gluttons — or wolverines as some call them — but he's not done it yet. Leopards? We've never had one. We do have the lion. But he is very old. Shall I have spots painted on him for you? No? Oh."

Eszterhazy had gone to the Benedictine Library. There were things there which were nowhere else . . . and, not seldom, that meant nowhere else . . . once, indeed, he had found the Papal Legate there, waiting for a chance to see something not even in the Vatican Library. It was stark and chill in the whitewashed chamber which served as waiting-room. Who was waiting for what? Eszterhazy was waiting for Brother Claudius, for even Eszterhazy might not go up into the vaulted hall where the oldest books were unless Brother Claudius showed him up; not even the Papal Legate might do so, and it was almost certain that not even the King-Emperor might . . . in the unlikely instance of the King-Emperor's going to the Benedictine Library

to look for a book . . . or anywhere else, for that matter. E. assumed that the tall, thin man slumped in the corner was also waiting for Brother Claudius. By and by, in came the lay-brother who acted as porter, and wordlessly set down a brazier of glowing coals before withdrawing.

The man in the corner moved. "Ah, good," he murmured. "One's hands have grown too cold." He got up, and, moving to the fire-chauldron, thrust his hands into it and drew them out filled with hot coals glowing red. His manner seemed abstracted. An odor of singeing hair was very slightly perceptible. Eszterhazy felt his own flesh crawl. Slowly, quite slowly, the man poured the red hot coals back upon the fire. "You are Doctor Eszterhazy," next he said.

The statement required no confirmation. "And you, sir? Who?"

Very slowly the tall body turned. A long finger stroked a long moustache. "I? Oh. I am the brother of the shadow of the slain. The vanguard of the shadows of the living. I —"

Light. "Ah yes. You are the medium, Mr. Mudge."

"I am the medium. Mr. Mudge. As well. Oh yes.

"I am really very pleased to have this occasion to meet the eminent Dr. Eszterhazy," said Mr. Mudge.

"Indeed," murmured the eminent, very faintly questioning. He himself was certainly very interested at meeting the eminent Mr. Mudge. But, somehow, he rather doubted that he was really very pleased.

"Yes, indeed. Ah. You are not here . . . or perhaps you *are* here . . . to consult the Second Recension of the *Malleus Maleficarum*?"

The doctor said that he was not, not adding that both witchcraft and the fury it had once aroused alike tended to be productive of a definite dull pain between and in back of his eyes. "I am here to consult the Baconian Fragment. If it *is* by Friar Roger. Which is doubtless subject to doubt. If it *is* a fragment; the end of the parchment is rather fragmented, but the text itself seems complete."

Mr. Mudge nodded. He seemed, certainly, to follow the comments. But his manner seemed also to be rather faintly abstracted. "Now, I wish to ask you about your former tutor," he said, and touched his full red tongue to his full red lips, and smiled. In fact the smile was not without a certain appeal, an effect, however, spoiled by . . . by what? . . . by the man's having rather yellow teeth?

"Which former tutor? I have had really a great many, as I began my formal education comparatively late, and was obliged to make up for lost time. So . . ."

"He calls himself sometimes Cosimo Damiano, though I understand that this is not precisely his legal name."

Well. Someone learned enough to read old books in Latin, and he wished to enquire about poor old — "Yes. And what did you wish to enquire?"

Could Dr. Eszterhazy recommend him? Certainly. The old man's Italian



knowledge was encyclopedic, his calligraphy was exquisite, and his knowledge of advanced geometry was . . . well . . . advanced. It was at this point that the door opened and Brother Claudius came in, hands tucked inside the sleeves of his habit. "Come with me," he directed in a hollow voice; and, as he did not say to whom he was saying this, and as he immediately turned and left again, they both followed him. Through many an icy corridor. Up many a worn, yet steep, flight of stairs. Into the vast vaulted hall lined to twice a man's height with books whose ancient odors still had, as far as Eszterhazy was concerned, the power to thrill. The monk gestured him to a table on which a book-box reposed. The monk next gestured Mr. Mudge further on and further on, eventually waving him to another table. On which, or so it seemed at a glance, another book-box reposed. Eszterhazy sat at the bench and opened the box.

Immediately he saw that a mistake had been made, but automatically he turned a few pages. Instead of the rather cramped and fuddled Italian hand which he had expected, massive and heavy 'black letter' met his eye. One line seemed to unfold itself in particular; had it at one time been underlined and the underlining eradicated? For the parchment was scraped under the line. **The mind of a demon is not the same as the mind of a man.** Indeed, no. And the *Malleus Maleficarum* was not the same as the Baconian Fragment.

"Pray excuse me, most reverend Brother," He heard the voice of Mr. Mudge, "but have you perhaps inadvertently given my item of choice to the learned doctor, and his to me?"

The hollow tone of Brother Claudius said, "Each has that which is proper for him now to read." And he removed a small box from his sleeve, and took snuff. The learned doctor, what was it they called Roger Bacon? Ah yes: **Doctor Mirabilis.** Well — Suddenly he looked up; there was Melancthon Mudge; had he *float*ed? Usually the old floor sounded. What? The old floor *always* sounded.

Always but now.

"Brother Claudius has gone now. Shall we change books?"

They changed books.

By and by, he having principally noted what he had come to note, and the day having grown chiller yet, Eszterhazy rose to leave. Without especial thought, he blew upon his hands. With an almost painful suddenness his

hand spun round towards the other man; he had not blown upon *his* hands to warm them! But the other man was gone.

It had been intimated to Eszterhazy that his name had been 'temporarily subtracted' from the military Active List for quite some years now, "for the purpose of continuing his education" — that meanwhile he had already obtained the baccalaureate, the licentiate, and two doctorates — and that unless he wished his name moved over to the Inactive List, very well, Engli, better Do Something about this. What he had done was to obtain transfer to the new Militia Reserve (as distinct from the not so new Reserve Militia), and as a result of having done so, found himself the very next week-end serving the twenty-five hours and twenty-five minutes which constituted his monthly service time with the Militia Reserve. (The Reserve Militia, as is well-known, had no monthly service time and instead required an annual service time of three weeks, three days, and three hours.) On reporting to the Armory he learned that although his having obtained a degree in mathematics had automatically shifted him from the Infantry to the Engineers, what was required of him this time had to do with another degree altogether.

"Surgeon-Commander Blauew's got the galloping gout again, Major Eszterhazy, and as you are, it seems, also a Doctor of Medicine, we need you for Medical Officer right now, and you can build us a fortress *next* month; haw haw!" was the adjutant's greeting.

"Very well, Adjutant. Very well. My that's a nasty-looking spot on your neck, there, well, well, I'll have a look at it after I've taken care of everything else;" and Temporary-Acting-Medical Officer Eszterhazy, E., moved on away, leaving the adjutant prey to dismal thoughts; and perhaps it would teach him not to play the oaf with his betters. The T.-A.-M.O. examined a number of candidates for the Militia Reserve, passed some, rejected some; made inspections which resulted in the Sanitary Facilities being very hastily and yet very thoroughly doused down with caustic soda and hot water; and delivered a brief and dispassionate lecture on social diseases to officers and men alike: to the great dis-ease of an elderly paymaster who said he doubted it was right to expose the younger men to such scientific language: perhaps not exactly what he meant. Sounds of drill command rang through the large hall with a surprising minimum of echo, in great measure because Eszterhazy (who had not read Vitruvius's *Ten Books* for nothing) was instrumental in obtaining a theater-architect as consultant during the hall's construction.

Eventually it was time for commissioned officers to withdraw for wine and rusks, a snack traditionally taken standing up even where there might be facilities for sitting down. "Seen you in the Bosnian Campaign," someone said; and, the Temporary-Acting-Medical Officer turning his head, recognized a face once more familiar than lately. The face was not only now

older, it was much, much redder. "Just dropped in to pay my respects," said the old soldier. "I am just here on my biennial leave. I am just a retired major in my own country, but I am a full colonel in the service of H.H. the Khedive of Egypt. Can I recruit you? Guarantee you higher rank, higher pay, higher respect, *several* servants, and heaps and heaps of fascinating adventure."

The younger man confessed himself already fascinated. He looked the Khedivial colonel in the man's slightly bulging, slightly blood-shot, entirely blue eyes, and said, "Tell me about it."

He listened without a single interruption until Col. Brennshekk got onto the subject of hunting in the Southern Provinces of H.H. — the southernmost boundaries of which evidently did not, as yet, exist. "— at least not on any official map; we intend to push 'em as far south as we can push 'em; now where was I? Ah yes! *Hippo!* Ah, you need a champion heavy ball for hippo! Say, a quarter of a pound. Same as elephant. Same as rhino." Perhaps indecisive which of the three to talk about first, Brennshekk paused.

Dr. Eszterhazy heard himself asking, "What about tiger?"

"Tiger, eh. Well, you would naturally want a lighter rifle for soft-skinned game. Say, a .500 . . . or better yet a .577 Express — a Lang or a Lancaster or any of the good ones."

Eszterhazy stroked his beard, trimmed closer than in the mode of fashion. "But are there tigers in Africa?"

The colonel appeared to be trying to say *Yes* and *No* simultaneously. To aid him he sipped his wine. Then: "Well, strictly to speak, *no*: there are no tigers in Africa. However, lots of chaps call them tigers. Am I making sense? I mean, leopards."

Something somewhere jingled. Or perhaps there was a ringing in the doctor's ears. He repeated, dully, "Leopards?"

Colonel Brennshekk explained that in some way leopards were more dangerous than tigers. Tigers, like lions, went along the level ground; leopards sometimes hid up trees. And pounced. Carefully setting down his wine, he bared his teeth, turned his hands into paws and his fingers into claws, and gave something in the way of a lunge which was nevertheless certainly intended to imitate a pounce. It seemed to his younger comrade that people for some reason had lately begun to imitate leopards for him. Was it a *trend*?

"What else do they do up trees? Besides prepare to pounce? Do they have their, no, one would not say 'nests,' do they have lairs —?"

No. No, leopards did not have lairs in trees. Well. Not precisely. In the manner of colonels the world over since the beginning of time, this one began to tell a story. "— recollect one day my native gun-bearer, chap named Pumbo — Pumbo? Yes. Pumbo. *Faithful* chap. Pumbo. Came running over to me and handed me my .577 Express. Said, 'Master, tiger,' which is to say, of course, *leopard*, said, 'tiger up tree, look-see, shoot-quick!' " He raised an

imaginary leopard-gun at an angle. "And as I was sighting, sighting, damn me! what did I see? A bloody young zebra or was it an antelope, bloody leopard had killed it by breaking its neck, as they do, and dragged it up into the upper crutch of the tree where I suppose it could *hang*, you know, all that galloping the wild game there does, makes it muscular and tough — 'nother thing," temporarily lowering his nonexistent rifle, the colonel got his wine back, looked at Eszterhazy over the rim of the mug; said, " 'nother thing. Hyenas can't get to it. Once it's up a *tree*. You know. *Well* —"

But that was the last which Eszterhazy was to hear of the matter, for at that moment a whistle sounded to signal a return to the duties of the twenty-five hours and twenty-five minutes; a whistle? It was the sort of nautical whistle called a boatswain's pipe and it was traditional to sound it at this point. No one at all knew why. That was what made it traditional.

In what had been the oldest and smallest schloss in Bella, long since escheated to The Realm, was the chamber of a gentleman whom rumor connected with the Secret Police. He was called by a number of names. Eszterhazy called him Max.

"Engelbert Kristoffr."

"Max."

Segars and decanters. "How is the great plan for the education going?" "Engelbert Kristoffr" said that it was coming along well enough. He supposed Max knew that he already had the M.D. and Phil.D. Yes? And the D.Sc. and D.Mus. were likely next. Of course degrees were not everything. Right now he was not taking a schedule of courses for any degree, but he considered that his education continued daily nonetheless. Max hummed a bit in his throat. "You shall certainly become the best-educated man in the Empire. I hope you begin to think of some great reforms. Everyone thinks that old Professor Doctor Kugelius is our best-educated man, why? because each year he gives the same lecture on *The Reconciliation of Aristotle and Plato* and it is actually fifty lectures and he delivers it in Latin and what is his conclusion? that, after all, Aristotle and Plato cannot be reconciled; you did not come to hear me talk about Aristotle and Plato." Said Max.

The guest shook his head. "I came to hear you talk about Mr. Melanchthon Mudge," he said.

There was indeed a file on Melanchthon Mudge and Engelbert Kristoffr read it and then they began to talk again. Said Max: "You well recall a Cabinet decision to hold the laws against witchcraft in abeyance. It simply would not do, in this day and age, for our country to start a prosecution for witchcraft. And as we prefer to believe that the matter is confined to harmless old women living in remote villages, there is really no mechanism to handle a latter-day sorcerer."

An ash was flicked off a segar with impatience. "I don't want the man burned or hanged or shackled, for heaven's sake. We have experts in the





sophistry of the law. Can't they simply get an excuse to get the man out of our country?"

Max very very slightly poured from the decanter to the mug. "Not so easily. Not when he has a lot of powerful friends. One of whom, are you not aware, is the aunt of your cousin Kristoffr Engelbert, of the Eszterhazy-Eszterhazy line; you are *not* aware? Ah, you were not, but are now. Having read the file." The file reminded him of the Sovereign Princess Olga Helena of Damrosch-Pensk; she was of course not sovereign at all, she was the widow of Lavon Demetrius, whose status as one of the once-sovereign princes of the Hegemony had been mediatized while he himself was yet a minor: the family retained titles, lands, money, and had nothing any longer to do with governance at all; was this a good thing? If they were under the spell of Mr. Mudge, probably.

"Nor is she the only one. Not every name is in the file; listen." Max repeated some of the names not in the file. Engelbert Kristoffr winced. "Is it that they are so immensely impressed because he makes the spirits blow trumpets, move tables, ring bells? In my opinion: *no*. They are so immensely impressed because they are weak in character and he is strong in character and he is very, very *bad* in character and his performances are merely as it were items chosen off a menu. Melanchthon Mudge, as he calls himself, has a very long menu, and if he did not impress the credulous by doing such things, well, he would impress them by doing other things. Was it only because Louis Napoleon and Amadeus of Spain and Alexander of Russia believed the spirits of the dead were at this fellow's command, lifting tables and sounding trumpets and ringing bells, that they gave him jewels? I don't think so. And I might ask you to look at what happened afterwards: Louis Napoleon deposed, dying in exile; Amadeus deposed and in exile; Alexander of Russia fatally blown up by political disaffecteds." Max banged his mug sharply on the scarred table-top. "And another thing. If he *has* such powers, why does he employ them lifting tables and tinkling bells? Why does he content himself with gifts of jewels from kings and emperors?"

Engelbert Kristoffr Eszterhazy thought of another question: Why is he — via the thought of him? — tormenting me? But he said, suddenly, aloud, "Because the mind of a demon is not the same as the mind of a man."

Said Max, "Well, there you are. There's your answer."

But, wondered Eszterhazy, to which question?

Having left the old, small castle to Max, its present master, Dr. Eszterhazy long wandered and long pondered. Was it indeed his fortune to have become involved with a Count Cagliostro, a century after the original? Was Melanchthon Mudge really "Melanchthon Mudge"? Could anyone be? And if not, who then was he? The learned doctor did not very much amuse himself by conjecturing that perhaps Giuseppe Balsamo had not really died in a Roman dungeon ninety years ago, but —

Of the so-called Pasqualine Dynasty [a learned correspondent wrote Dr. Engelbert] few literary remains exist, and almost without exception they are very dull remains indeed. Only one reference do I find of the least interest, and that is to a so-called Pasqualine Ring. Do your old friends know about it? Legends for a while clustered thick, stories that "it had been worn upon the very thumb of Albertus Magnus," is one of them; I cannot even say if thumb-rings were known in the day of the good Bishop and Universal Doctor — you may also have heard it assigned to the thumbs of two anomalous Englishmen named Kelly (or Kelley) and Dee — and one of the innumerable editions of the *Faustusbuch* — but enough! Do think of me when you see your old and noble tutor, and ask him . . . whatever [and here the learned correspondent passed on to another subject entirely].

Why had not Engelbert Eszterhazy, Ph.D., M.D., long since removed his old and (perhaps, who knows) royal tutor and wife to a comfortable chamber in the house at 33 Turkling Street? He had offered, and the offer had with an exquisite politeness been declined. Why had he not bestowed a pension? To this question: the same reply. Had he, then, to relieve the burden of want, done nothing? No, not nothing. One day he had encountered the owner of the tottering tenement in which lodged the King and Queen of the Single Sicily in Exile, herself (the owner) a widow incessantly bending beneath the burden of many debts, herself; part in sorrow, part in shame, she said that she would shortly have to double their rent: Dr. Eszterhazy easily persuaded her to mention no such thing to them, but to apply instead to him quarterly for the difference: done. So. There he was one day, visiting, and presently he asked, "And the ring of Duke Pasquale?"

"We have it, we have it," said 'the Queen.' In her haggard, ancient way, she was still beautiful. "We have it. So," she said. "It is all that we have. But we have it. So."

Eszterhazy sat silent. "I will have them bring you a cup of chocolate. Clarinda?" she raised her voice. "Leona? Ofelia?" As, not surprisingly, none of these imaginary attendants answered the summons, the Queen, murmuring an apology, rose to "see what they are all doing," and withdrew into a curtained niche behind which (Eszterhazy well knew) reposed the tiny charcoal brazier and the other scant equipment of their scant kitchen. Politely, he looked instead at the King.

The general outlines of the face and form of him who, with infinite sincer-

ity, called himself 'King of the Single Sicily,' would have been familiar to, at least, readers of the British periodical press; for they were the form and features of Mr. *Punch* (himself originally a native of The Italies, under the name of Signor Punchinello); though the expression of their faces was entirely different. His lady wife did not in any way resemble *Judy*. The King now said, "I shall have the Lord Great Chamberlain bring it." As Cosimo Damiano's former pupil was wondering what piece of gimcrack or brummagem the, alas, cracked imaginations of the pair would work on, the King said, with a gesture, "The view of the hills is remarkably clear today, my son. We are high here. Very high. See for yourself." Eszterhazy politely rose to his feet, went to the window. The window was now graced with a single curtain; there had at one time been two; and some might have seen a resemblance to the other in the garment which the Queen now wore wrapped around her ruined silken dress rather in the manner of a sari.

Clear or not, the view was so restricted by the crumbling walls of the adjacent tenements as to consist of an irregular blur a few feet tall and a few inches wide. Behind him he heard a soft scuffling, shuffling sound. He heard the King say, "Thank you. That is all. You may go." After a moment Eszterhazy felt it safe to say that the view was indeed remarkable. In reply, he was informed that his chocolate was ready. He withdrew slowly from the view, homeopathically of the hills of the Scythian Highlands, and otherwise and very largely of goats, pigs, washing, dogs, children, chickens, rubbish-tips, and other features of the always informal great South Ward; and took his seat. And his chocolate.

It was very good chocolate. It should have been. He had given them a canister of it a while ago and some, with a vanilla-bean in it to keep it fresh. As, each time he visited, there was always a cup given to him, either the canister — like the pitcher of Philemon and Baucis — was inexhaustible, or the royal couple never drank any at all. Well, well. It gave them pleasure to give, and this was in itself a gift.

"And this," said the King, after a moment, "is the ring of Duke Pasquale." And he produced an immensely worn little box not entirely covered anymore with eroding leather and powdering velvet. And, with a dextrous push, sprang up the lid. It made a faint sound.

Eszterhazy with great presence of mind did not spill his hot chocolate into his lap.

Evidently the tarnished band was silver, as — evidently — the untarnished and untarnishable band was gold. They were intertwined and must have been the very devil to keep clean, whenever the task was still being attempted. Though somewhat mis-shapen — perhaps something heavy had rested on it, long ago? while it was being perhaps hidden, long ago? — the width hinted that it might indeed have been a thumb-ring. Long ago. And set into it was a diamond of antique cut, more antique certainly even than the ring-work.

"There were once many," said the old man.

"Oh yes," said the old woman. "The wonder of it, as it must have been. The Pasqualine Diamonds, as they were called. Who knows where the others are. We know where this one is. He besought us to sell. So, so. Conceive of it. Sell? We did not even show."

Eszterhazy brought himself back to his present physical situation, drank off some of the chocolate. Asked, "And do you wear the ring? Ever? Never? Often?"

The old woman shook her mad old head. "Only on appropriate occasion." She did not say what an appropriate occasion would be; he did not ask. He observed that the ring was on a chain, one of very common metal. His finger touched it. He raised his eyes. "It is the custom to wear it on a chain," she said. "When one wears it, it should be worn on a chain, like a pendant. So, so, so. My late and sainted father-in-law wore it on a silver chain, and his late and sainted father wore it on a golden one. Thus it should be. So. Or," the pause could not be called a hesitation, "almost always so. So, so, so. One does not wear it on a finger, not even on the thumb; certainly not on the finger; on the thumb, least of all. It would be a bad thing to do so. So, so, so. Very bad, very bad. It is ours to be keeping and ours to be guarding. As you see. So, so. So, so, so." She coughed.

Her husband the King said, "I shall take it now, my angel." Take it he did; it was done so deftly and swiftly that Eszterhazy was not sure what was done with it. He had some idea. He was not sure.

Need he be?

No.

It was madness to think of these two mad old people living in poverty year after year, decade after decade, when a fortune lay ready to be redeemed. It was mad; it was also noble. Turn the ring into money, turn the money into silk dresses, linen shirts, unbroken shoes, proper and properly furnished apartments; turn it into beef and pork and poultry and salad fresh daily, into good wine and wax candles or modern oil-lamps — turn it as one would: how long would the money last? Did the 'King of the Single Sicily' think just then in such terms? Perhaps. He said, as he accompanied his former pupil to the worm-eaten door, this is what he said: "Today's fine food is tomorrow's ordure. And today's fine wine is tomorrow's urine. Today's fine clothes are tomorrow's rags. And today's fine carriages are tomorrow's rubble. And after one has spent one's long and painful years in this world, one wishes to have left behind at least one's honor unstained. Which is something better than ordure, urine, rags, and rubble. Something more than urine, ordure, rubble, and rags. Be such things far from thee, my son. Farewell now. Go with the Good God and Blessed Company of the Saints."

One must hope. Eszterhazy went.

Thus: the Pasqualine Ring.

\* \* \*



There had been a meeting of the University's Grand Ancillary Council, to discuss (once again) the private-docent question; and, Eszterhazy being a junior member, he had attended. The conclusion to which the Grand Ancillary Council had come was (once again) that it would at that specific meeting come to no conclusion. And filed out, preceded by dignitaries with muffs and ruffs and chains of office and maces and staves and drummers and trumpeters. About the necessity of all this to the educational process, Dr. Eszterhazy had certainly some certain opinions; and, being still but a junior member, kept them to himself.

The Emperor, who was *ex-officio* Protector, Professor-in-Chief, Grand Warden, and a muckle many other offices, to and of the University, did not attend . . . he never attended . . . but, as always, had sent them a good late luncheon instead of a deputy: this was more appreciated. Eszterhazy found himself in discussion over slices of a prime buttock of beef with a Visiting Professor of one of the newer disciplines, 'Ethnology' it was called. Older faculty members regarded an occasional lecture on Ethnology as a permissible amusement; further than that, they would not go. "Where did your last expedition take you?" asked Eszterhazy. Professor De Blazio said, West Africa, and asked Eszterhazy to pass the very good rye bread with caraway seeds. This passed, it occurred to the passer to ask if there were leopards in West Africa. "Although," he added, "that is hardly Ethnology."

De Blazio said something very much like, "Chomp, chomp, gmurgle." Then he swallowed. Then he said, "Ah, but it is, because in West Africa we have what is called the Leopard Society. I believe it to be totemic in origin. *Totem*, do you know the word *totem*? A North-American Red-Indian word meaning an animal which a family or clan in primitive society believes to have been its actual ancestor. Some say this creature changes into human form and back again. — Not bad, this beef. — Is it Müller who sees in this the source of heraldic animals? Can one quite imagine the British Queen turning into a lion at either the full or the dark of the moon? Ho Ho Ho." Each Ho of Professor De Blazio was delivered in a flat tone. Perhaps he felt one could not quite imagine it. "Mustard, please."

Eating the roast beef, for a few moments, speaking English between mouthfuls, Eszterhazy could think himself in England. And then the stewards came carrying round the slabs of black bread and the pots of goose grease. And he knew that he was exactly where he now thought he was: in

Bella, the sometimes beautiful and sometimes squalid capital of the Triune Monarchy of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania.

Fourth largest empire in Europe.

The Turks were fifth.

The gas-lights in the great salon in the town-house of old Colonel Count Cruttz were famous gas-lights. Cast in red bronze, they were in the form of mermaids, each the length of a tall man's arm, and each clasping in cupped hands the actual jets for the gas flames as they, the mermaids, faced each other in a great circle: with mouths slightly open, they might be imagined as singing each to each. This was perhaps a high point of a sort in illumination, here in Bella. Well-dried reeds were used to soak up mutton-tallow or other kitchen grease, and these formed the old-fashioned rush-lights which the old-fashioned (or the poor) still used at night. They smelled vile. But they were cheap. Their flickering, spurting light was not good to read by. But they were cheap. They were very, very cheap. Tallow-candles. Whale-oil. Colza-oil, allegedly stolen here and there by Tartars to dress their cole-slaw. Coal-oil, also called paraffin or kerosene. Gas-lamps. From each pair of red-gold hands the red-gold flames leaped high, soughing and soaring. Often attempts had been made to employ the new experimental gas mantles. But Colonel Count Cruttz always shot them away with his revolver-pistol.

Colonel Count Cruttz looked sober enough tonight; of course, that was subject to change, although it was customary for nothing but champagne to be served at such soirées, and it was not in accordance with his reputation to become shooting-drunk (even gas-mantle-shooting drunk) on such a ladies' drink as champagne. Still. If a bullet from a revolver-pistol, or two or three, could solve a certain problem of which signs were likely to be shown tonight — if so, gladly would Doctor Eszterhazy ply Colonel Count Cruttz with brandy, vodka, rum, gin, shnapps, and whiskey. Or, for that matter, *alcohol absolutus*. As, however, it was not to be more than thought of, he would have to . . . what would he have to do?

. . . something else.

In one half of the great salon, the soirée looked like any and every other soirée in Bella: that is, an imitation of a soirée in Vienna, which in turn would be an imitation of one in Paris. Few things bored Eszterhazy more than a Bellanese soirée, though they were, barring boredom, harmless. The other half of the great salon, under the soaring gas-lights, was not in the least like every other soirée in Bella, for everyone in that half of the room was gathered around one sole person: a breach of good manners indeed. One might give a 'reception' for a particular person and that person might be lionized, surrounded; this was to be expected. But a soirée was not a reception, at least it was not intended to be, and it was good manners neither in those gathered round one person nor for that one person to allow it. But — *allow it?*

Mr. Mudge reveled in it.

Those in the other half of the room strolled around for the most part by ones and twos, now and then uttering polite words to those they walked with or to those they encountered. What was going to happen? By now Doctor Eszterhazy knew. Someone would give a polite hand-clap. Others would fall silent. Someone would say what good luck they all had. Someone would speak, obliquely, of the Spirits which — or who — had ‘crossed over,’ and how, for reasons not only not made clear but never mentioned, they sometimes were pleased to make use of ‘the justly-famous Mr. Mudge’ as the medium of their attempts to contact the living. Eszterhazy had, he hoped, a most open mind: the received opinion of thousands of years to the contrary, the spirits of the dead were *not* where they could neither reach nor be reached? Very well. Let the evidence be presented, and he would form . . . perhaps . . . an opinion. But he knew no evidence that any of the so-called spirits had passed their time, whilst living, in tipping tables or sounding very tatty-looking trumpets or ringing lots of little bells; and so he did not think they would do so, now that they were dead, as a means of proving that they were not really entirely dead after all. Mr. Mudge did it (assuming it to be Mr. Mudge who did it); Mr. Mudge did it all very well.

But did any of it need to be done at all?

Eszterhazy could not think so.

He was not altogether alone.

“Engli, need we got to have all this?” asked a man, no longer at all young, with a weather-beaten and worn . . . worn? eroded! . . . face, stopping as he strolled.

“Not if you do not wish it had, Count.”

The Count almost doubled over in an agony of conviction. “I *don’t*! I *don’t*! Oh, I thought nothing when Olga Pensk asked it of me, that was a month ago, always have had a soft spot in me heart for her, *lovely* young girl her daughter is — But oh I’ve heard such a lot in that month. And I can’t get back to talk to Olga about it. She won’t see me. She’s become that creature’s creature. Look at her, doesn’t take her eyes off him, let me tell you what I have heard.”

But Eszterhazy, saying that perhaps he had heard it, too, urged that this be put off to another time.

“Do something, do something, do something,” begged the Count and Colonel. “I know what I’d love to do, and would *do*, hadn’t all of us in the Corps of Officers given our solemn vow and oath to his Royal and Imperial Majesty neither to fight duels nor commit homicides; wish I *hadn’t*. Engli. Engli. You’re a learned chap. You lived how many a month was it with the Old Men of the Mountains, didn’t you learn —”

But Eszterhazy was lightly clapping his hands.

Afterwards, he had brief misgivings. *Had* he been right to have done it at all? To have done it the way he had done? That Melanchthon Mudge

thought this-or-that about it: on this he did not need to waste thought. The Sovereign Princess of Damrosch-Pensk, would she ever forgive him? Too bad, if she would not. But suppose that collegium of white wizards, the Old Men of the Mountains, to hear of it; what would *they* think? Well, well, he had not depended on what they had taught him for everything he'd done in the great salon of Colonel Count Cruttz's townhouse. Even the common sorcerers of the Hyperborean High Lands dearly loved the rude, the bawdy, the buffoon; they did not rank with the Old Men, but he had taken some pains to learn from them, too.

And though he told himself that he did not need think about Mr. Mudge, think about Mr. Mudge he did. If he had denounced Mr. Mudge as a heretic; a heresiarch, satanist, and diabolist; if he had made him seem black and scarlet with infamously classical sins? Why, certainly the man would have loved it. Swelled with pride. Naturally. But he, Eszterhazy, had not done it. Nothing of the sort. He had parodied the usual ritual of the séance. He had reduced the introductory words to gibberish and, worse by far than merely that, to *funny* gibberish. He had made the table tip, totter, fall back, to the audible imitation of an off-color street-song, as though accompanied on, not one trumpet, but a chorus of trumpets, as played by a chorus of flatulent demons. He had done something similar with his summoning-up, in mockery, of the spirit bells. Was it not enough to show how others could do it? Did he *have* to have them ring in accompaniment to the naughty (recognizable — but who would admit it?) song on the 'trumpet'?

Well, 'need.' *Need makes the old dame trot*, went the proverb.

He had *done* it.

The whole doing was a mere five minutes long; but it had, of course, made it utterly impossible for Mudge, with or without others, to give his own performance. Absolutely impossible, right afterwards. And who knows for how long impossible, subsequently? He had lost the best part of his audience, for certainly the effect was ruined. If he would indeed try a repetition, elsewhere, a week, a fortnight, even a month, months later, he would hardly dare do so in the presence of any who had been there then. A single guffaw would have meant death.

And eloquent of death was the man's face as his eyes met Eszterhazy's. It was but for a moment; then the face changed. No hot emotion showed as he came up to Eszterhazy, the Colonel Count rather hastily stepping up to be ready, in case of need, to step between them. But no. "Very amusing, Doctor," said Mr. Mudge. He bowed and said a few courteous words to the host. Then he left. Leaving with him, her own face as though carved in ice, was the Sovereign Princess Olga Helena. Not icy, but perhaps rather confused, was the face of her daughter, the Highlady Charlotte, own cousin to Eszterhazy's own cousin. Had she, too, believed? Well, it were better she should now doubt. That there were sincere people in the ranks of the spiritualists, the doctor did not doubt. That some were not alone sincere, but,





also, even, good, he was prepared to admit. But Mr. Mudge was something else, and if indeed he were sincere, it was in the sincerity of evil.

It made of course no difference to the chemistry of Glauber's Salts what name was given them or who had first discovered them. But it was a hobby-horse of Eszterhazy's, one which he so far trusted himself never to ride along the nearer paths which lead to lunacy, that the pursuit of inorganic cathartics marked the real watershed between alchemy and chemistry. The 'philosopher' who, turning away from the glorious dreams of transmuting dross to gold, sought instead a means of moving the sluggish bowels of the mass of mankind and womankind, had taken his head out of the clouds and brought it very close to the earth indeed. **Quaere:** How did the dates of Ezekkiel Yahnosh compare with those of Johann Glauber? **Responsum:** Go and look them up. That the figures in the common books were unreliable, E.E. knew very well. He had also known (he now recalled) that there was a memorial to the great seventeenth-century Scythian savant somewhere in the back of the Great Central Reformed Tabernacle, commonly called the Calvinchurch, from the days when it — or its predecessor — was the only one of that faith in Bella.

**Q.:** Why might he not go right now and copy it? **R.:** Why not? — unless it were closed this hour on Sunday night. But this caveat little recked with the zeal of Predicant Prush, even now ascending into the pulpit, as Eszterhazy tried to collect his information as unobtrusively as possible from the marble plaque set in the wall. "My text, dear and beloved trustworthy brothers and sisters," boomed the Preacher from beneath the sounding-board, "is Jeremiah, V, 6. *Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evening shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: everyone that goeth out shall be torn to pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased. Miserable sinners, there is nevertheless hope in repentance!*" cried out the Predicant in a plentitude of Christian comfort. And went on to demonstrate that the animals mentioned in the text were *types*, which is to say, *foreshadowings*, with the lion signifying the Church of Rome, the wolf implying Luther; and the leopard, recalcitrant paganism. As for transgressions and backsliding, Dr. Prush gave them quite a number for exempla, ranging from Immodest Attire to Neglect Of Paying Tithes. "Woe! Woe!" he cried, smiting the lec-

tern.

But Eszterhazy was not concentrating on the sermon. There rang incessantly in his ear, as though being chanted into it by something sitting upon his shoulder, only the words *a leopard shall watch over their cities* . . .

And, when back at home, he examined his scant notes for the dates of Ezekkiel Yahnosh, he found that, really, all that he had written in their place was *Jeremiah*, V, 6.

Many a set of hoopskirts worn in Bella in their time, many a crinoline worn in Bella in its time, many a bustle worn in Bella (around about then or not a long span later being their time) had been fashioned in the ever-fashionable stablishment of Mademoiselle Sophie, Couturière Parisienne. Mlle. Sophie was a native of a canton perhaps better known for its cuckoo-clocks than its *haute couture*, but she had nevertheless plied a needle and thread in Paris. She had plied it chiefly in replacing buttons in a basement tailor-shop until her vast commonsense told her to get up and go out of the basement into the light and air. She hadn't stopped going until she reached Bella, and if her trip and her beginnings in business had indeed been 'under the protection' of a local textile merchant who sometimes visited Paris on business, why, whose affair was that? That is, who else's affair? Nevertheless, most of the women's garments in Bella owed nothing to the fact that Mlle. Sophie gained her bread by the pricks of her needle; and perhaps a slight majority of the women's garments in Bella owned nothing at all to what was worn in Paris. Even as Eszterhazy paused to throw down and step upon a segar, several woman — evidently sisters — passed by dressed in the eminently respectable old high burger style: costly cloth stiff with many a winter day's embroidery, the bodices laced with gold-tipped laces, each stiff petticoat of bright color slightly shorter than the one underneath. No one else even much noticed.

Still, someone laughed, and it was not a nice laugh. Eszterhazy did not move his head, but his eyes slightly moved. Just across the narrow street was Melanchthon Mudge, clad in fur-coat and fur-hat whose gloss must have represented a fortune in sable and other prime pelts: what was he laughing at? Slowly approaching was a woman by herself. She moved with difficulty. She had been limping with a side-to-side motion which caused her short and heavy body to rock in a manner that allowed little dignity. Nothing about her was rich, and certainly not the rusty black cloth coat which covered the upper part of her dingy black dress: truth to tell it was not even over-clean. Her face was not young and it was not comely and it seemed fuddled with effort. Such things as gallantry and pity aside, if one thought the grotesque laughable, then one would understandably laugh at the sight of her. But such laughter, merely the comcomitant of a country culture which laughed at cripples and stammerers, was more puzzling when it came from Mudge. The woman clearly heard the laugh, was clearly not indifferent to it. She

tried to walk on more swiftly, rocked and swayed more heavily; there was another laugh; abruptly Mudge walked off.

On the poor woman's head was a bonnet of the sort which had been favored, perhaps a generation ago, by fashion in the North-American provinces. So, on the spur of the moment, Eszterhazy, lifting his own hat, addressed her in English.

"You don't have such picturesque native costume," the slightest inclination of his head towards the wearers of the local picturesque costume, "in your own country, I believe, ma'am."

She slowly rocked to a stop and looked at him with, at first, some doubt. "No, sir," said she, "we don't, and that's a fact. We haven't had the time to develop it. Utility has been our motto. Maybe too much so. You don't know who I am, do you? No. But I know you, Mr. Esthermazy, if only by sight, for you've been pointed out to me. Reverend Ella May Butcher, European Mission, First Spiritualist Church, Buffalo, N.Y." She extended her hand, he — automatically — had begun to stoop to kiss it — she gave a firm shake — he did not stoop. "My late husband was very well acquainted with President Fillmore. But you don't know President Fillmore here." She was in this correct. Neither Eszterhazy personally nor the entire Triune Monarchy had known President Fillmore: there . . . or anywhere.

"I've come to show those deep in sorrow that their beloved ones have been saved from the power of the shadow of death. It ain't for me to say why the spirits of those who've passed over are sometimes pleased to use me as their medium, Mr. Esthermazy. We have settings on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, the Good Lord willing, at eight o'clock P.M. in the room at the head of the stairs in the old Scottish Rite hall. No admission charge is ever made; love offering only." If Reverend Ella May Butcher was offered much such love, there was nothing to show it. The flat level of her voice did not vary as she asked, "Do you know that man who laughed at me just now?"

The shouting of the teamsters and the clash of hooves on the stone blocks obliged him to raise his voice. "We have met," he said.

Widow Butcher looked at him with her muddy eyes. "There are spirits of light, sir; and there are spirits of darkness. That one's gifts never came from the light. I have to go on now. I hope to see you at one of our settings. Thank you for your kindness." He bowed slightly, lifted his hat, she lifted her skirts as high as was proper for a lady to lift them (a bit higher than would have been proper perhaps in London, but surely not too high for Bella and doubtless not too high for Buffalo, New York, where her late husband had been very well acquainted with President Fillmore), and prepared to cross the broader street. At this signal the filthy scarecrow which was the crossing-sweeper leaned both hands on the stick of his horrid broom and plowed her a way through the horse-dung. Eszterhazy watched as she poked in her purse for a coin; then a knot of vans and wagons went toiling by, laden high

with barrels of goose-fat and rye meal and white lard and yellow lard. And when they had gone, so had she.

He had not expected to meet Mr. Mudge within the week, but he had not expected to be in the South Ward within the week, either. Someone had reported to him that a certain item of horse-furniture was in a certain popular pawnshop there, and someone had said that — not having been redeemed when the loan expired — the item (it was a mere ornament, but then, too, perhaps the horse which first had borne it had also borne the last Byzantine Emperor) was now for sale.

"Impossible," said a familiar voice. Outside the pawnshop.

And another voice, less familiar, but . . . familiar . . . said . . . asked, " 'Impossible'? Impossible for you to do it when two Emperors and one King have already done it?"

There was D. Cosimo D., looking as though he would be away, and there was Mr. Mudge, looking as though he would not let him go. "I do not know other than nothing of it," said Cosimo.

Mudge said he would 'explain the matter yet again.' The briefly reigning King Amadeus of Spain had been pleased to give Mr. Mudge a gift of jewels. Louis Napoleon, Emperor of the French, had given him some other jewels. And a third such royal gift had come from Alexander, late Czar of all the Russians. "By the merest coincidence," said Mudge, "they contained elements of the so-called Pasqualine Diamonds. That is to say, I now have them all. I can show you the Deeds of Gifts."

"I wish not to see them. *Gifts!*"

"That is to say, all but the thumb-ring of Duke Pasquale. Without it, the set is incomplete. You may name a price. Money, lands; lands and money — whatever. I shall execute a will demising the jewels all to your noble house. I —"

"I, sir. Know nothing. Have nothing to sell. Desire nothing to obtain. Ah, my son" — to Eszterhazy — "You have heard? Am I not right?"

And Eszterhazy said, "The King of the Single Sicily is right."

A week later, as Eszterhazy emerged from his club in Upper Hunyadi Street, a tall man seemed to uncoil from a bench, and, in an instant, stood before him. It was Melanchthon Mudge. Melanchthon Mudge was before him, the bench was alongside of him, a stone pillar of the colonnade was behind him. Only one way of passage remained, but he did not seek to take it. The man wished to do it so? Well, let him do it so, then.

"Be quick," he said.

"Dr. Eszterhazy," said the tall, thin man, earnestly; "you have twice affronted me." Eszterhazy looked at him with a face which was absolutely expressionless, and said absolutely nothing. Mudge seemed rather disconcerted at this; and, a moment having passed, he compressed his lips, some-



thing like a frown beginning to appear: this vanished almost at once. A smile replaced it; one might easily see how very many had regarded it as a charming smile. Very often. "You have, Doctor, twice affronted me, I say. But I cannot believe that you ever meant to do so. This being the case, you will take no affront when I explain to you what the affronts were" — and still, Eszterhazy did not move. He continued to gaze with motionless eyes.

Mudge cleared his throat. Then he held up one finger of his left hand and he pressed upon it with one finger of his right. "To begin with, although perfectly aware of my perfect reasons for wishing to purchase the Pasqualine Ring, you urged its present owner not to part with it." He paused. No reaction. No reply. A second finger came forward on the extended left hand, was pressed upon with the forefinger of the right. "You also, doubtless purely as a jape, counterfeited — by some species of parlor trick which in another and lesser man I should term 'charlatanry' — counterfeited those great gifts which are mine as donatives of the Spirits. Now, sir, I do urge you, Dr. Eszterhazy, not to presume to affront me a third time. I am in process of taking a most important step in my personal life. It would mean that we would meet so very often that I should desire to be upon no terms with you save the very friendliest. But if you —"

Eszterhazy's eyes shifted suddenly, transfixed the other man with such a sort of look that the man winced. A brief cry, as of pain, was torn from his throat. "Wretch, rogue, and scoundrel," Eszterhazy said; "I well know that you have it in your black mind to propose marriage to my cousin's cousin, the Highlady Charlotte of Damrosch-Pensk. This, it does not lie within my power to prevent; that is, her mother being in something close to vassalage to you, we both know why, you may propose. I shall tell you what does lie within my power. By the terms of her late father's will, the Highlady Charlotte is in effect a ward of the Emperor until her thirtieth year — unless she is lawfully married before that day. I have already seen to it that a full statement of your depraved behavior in other countries, your disgusting statements set by your own hand in writing in regard to another lady, and the abhorrent circumstances under which you became, first famous, and then rich — I have with a great and grim pleasure seen to it that the Lord President of the Privy Council now knows it all. The present Emperor will never give his assent without consulting the Lord President. And —"

But this next sentence was scarcely begun when something unseen struck

Eszterhazy a blow and sent him with great force reeling against the pillar from where he had been standing several feet away. It was of course painful, it left him breathless and without power of speech: all his effort went into remaining upright; he clutched the pillar, backwards, with both his hands.

Even as he felt himself stagger, he saw the medium, face set for one fearful second into a rictus of rage, go striding away and down the steps. His cloak flew almost level with the ground. There was another voice echoing in Eszterhazy's ears, very faint it was, very faintly echoing. *There are spirits of light, sir; and there are spirits of darkness. That one's gifts never came from the light. . . .*

Eszterhazy, coming up the slum stairs to where the old couple lived, was not at first surprised to hear the sounds of altercation. The place was, after all, a *slum*, and slum-dwellers tend when angered not merely to speak out but to shout. What surprised him was to hear the old noblewoman's voice raised, even briefly. What could — Ah. Ahah. The local muckman was trying to collect garbage-fees. So. True, that the work was damnably hard. True that in the South Ward the fees were often damnably hard to collect. True, that it was hard to imagine the old couple's scanty diet producing enough garbage to be worth feeing. And, true, bullying was a time-established way of collecting the fees. Or trying to.

A fat, foul smell, filthy and greasy, announced its owner even before the sight of the fat, foul body on the landing by the door — fat, foul, smelly, greasy — voice coarse, loud, hectoring. “— wants me entitles!” the voice shouted. “Wants me ten copperkas!” Fat, smeary shoulders thrusting at partially-closed door. “’r I takes the tea-pot off the cloth and the cloth off the table and —” The third take was never mentioned, the door flew open wider, there stood the dauntless little ‘Queen,’ something glinted, something flashed. The muckman gave a hoarse howl and fell back, struggling for balance. The door closed. The muckman whirled around, flesh quivering; flesh, where a hand fell for a moment away, flesh bleeding. Scratches on the rank, besmeared arm. Made by — made by what? “That she-cat,” grumbled the man, fear giving way to mere astonishment and dull defeated rage — made by small embroidery shears? or —

“That she-cat has claws,” said the muckman, and stumped away down. The rank smell of him alone remained.

Inside, a moment later, there was of course no mention of it all. They seemed a bit more haggard, a bit more harried than usual. He asked if there were not, was there not? something wrong. They looked at him with wasted eyes. “The ring. Duke Pasquale's ring. The ring. He shall never have it. Never.”

“Cosimo, I saw a very curious thing.”

“And what was that, my dear one?”

"I saw a leopard, Cosimo, leaping from roof to roof, till it was out of sight. Was that not curious?"

"Indeed, my dear one, that was very curious indeed. Not many people are vouchsafed to see visions. By and by, perhaps, we will understand. The soup is now very warm. Let me feed you, as I already have our spoon."

If this were a nightmare, thought Eszterhazy, then he would presently shout himself awake, and . . . "*If this were a nightmare*"! And suppose this were *not*? But these thoughts were all peripheral. He felt things he had never felt before, sensed that for which he knew no terms of sensation. Impressions immensely deep, and immensely unfamiliar. And then some sort of barrier was broken, and he felt it break, and things ceased to be immeasurably alien; but he was not comforted by this, not at all, for everything which was now at all familiar was very horribly so: he heard very ugly sounds made by things he could not see and he saw (if only fleetingly or on the periphery of vision) very ugly things doing things he could not hear. In so far as it resembled anything it resembled the grotesque paintings of the Lowlander Jan Bos: but mostly it resembled nothing. Fire bubbled in his brain like lava. To breathe was to be tortured by his own body. Terror was a solid thing sucking marrow from his bones. He caught sight of a certain known face and on the face, its mouth slightly parted and wet yellow teeth exposed, was an expression of lust and glee.

Who was this, suddenly seizing his arm, face now a chalky mask with charcoal smudges under the eyes? "My son, he will not grant it, he will not grant it! I said to his secretary, 'Father, forget that I am the rightful King of the Single Sicily and consider only that I am a child faithful to Mother Church and with a wife who is sick, Father, sick!' But he will not grant it! *Marón!*"

What Cosimo Damiano was doing in the Mutton Market of the Tartar Section, Eszterhazy did not know; but then he did not know at all what he himself was doing there. And if he himself had, in a state of confusion of mind, wandered far — why then, why not his old tutor? "Sir. Who will not grant what?" — though, already, he had begun to guess.

"Why, license for an exorcism! Our parish priest reminds me that he himself, though willing, cannot do so without a faculty from the bishop . . . in this case the archbishop . . . that is, the Prince-Patriarch of Bella. I begged the secretary, 'Father,' I said — But it doesn't matter what I said. Away he went with his head to one side and back he came with his head to the other side, and he shook his head. His Eminence will not grant it. . . ."

Ancient custom, having the force of canon law, decreed that the Archbishop and Prince-Patriarch of Bella be called "His Eminence" just as though he were a cardinal; and His Eminence's secretary was Monsignor (not merely "Father") Macgillicuddy. Msgr. Macgillicuddy was descended

from those Erse warlords whose departure from their afflicted Island has been compared to the flight of the wild geese: unlike the nonmetaphorical ones, those wild geese never flew back, but drifted slowly from one Catholic kingdom to another. Msgr. Macgillicuddy had been 200 years out of Ireland and no one still in Ireland looked as exquisitely Irish as did Msgr. Macgillicuddy. Perhaps it was a shame that there was no Gaelic monarch at whose court he might be serving instead, and perhaps he did not think so. He belonged to no order, he was attached to no ethnic faction of the Empire or the Church, and if he said that the Prince-Patriarch-Archbishop would allow no exorcism, then that — absolutely — as Eszterhazy well knew — was that.

To one side a bow-legged Tartar made a sudden dive at a scaping ram, bucked it shoulder to shoulder, slipped arm and hand between the beast's forelegs, seized a hind leg and pulled forward; the ram went backward, the Tartar swiveled around and, having dropped the leg, from behind seized the animal's shoulders. The ram sat upright, and could not move. Along came the butcher's men with their ropes. Escape had been short-lived. A covey of quaint figures, the old Tartar women of the Section, huddled into shawls and veils and skirts and pantaloons, began to gather, each intent on the fresh mutton for the evening's shashliks. Escape had been very short-lived. For a while the ram had been king of the mountains, defending his meadow of grass and wild thyme and his harem of ewes. But that was over now.

As to *why* Cosimo Damiano wanted a faculty for his parish priest to perform an exorcism, the old man would be anything but specific. His cracked old brain was cracking wider now under the strain of — of what? Of something bad, of bad things, things which were very, very bad: and happening to *him*. And to his sick old wife. Charms were not enough, amulets and talismans not enough, holy water and prayers and Latin Psalms: not enough. Any more. *Cornuto*, usually efficacious against the *strega*? Not enough.

"But . . . Sir . . . do give me an example? — a single sample?"

Almost as though not so much obeying or answering his former pupil as being made a thrall by something else, in a second the body of the old man twisted and the face of the old man twisted and the voice of the old man changed . . . swift, sudden: movement, sound: frightful . . . Eszterhazy tottered back. Another second and the old man was as before, and trembling with terror. With a stifled croaking wail he scuttled off.

The aged females of the Tartar Section were wending their ways to their homes, each with a portion of mutton-meat wrapped in a huge cabbage-leaf. Eszterhazy paid no attention. In the face of the old man a moment ago, in the body of the old man then, in the grum, grim voice, he had for one second, but for a significant one, recognized and been horribly reminded of the same frightful features of his own recent nightmare . . . if such they were . . . the phrase *psychic assault* came to his mind. What was there in his clean, well-furnished laboratory to help them all against this? Eszterhazy mut-





tered, "Aroint thee, Satan." And he spat three times.

And all these . . . these assaults . . . against himself, against the old man and the old wife . . . why? Merely affront and pride? Because, come down to common denominators, what were *they*? What was *it*? It was the ring of Duke Pasquale, that antique family heirloom with which the aged couple would not part. Was it indeed because he coveted the jewel as part of a set otherwise incomplete, that the current enemy was setting these waves of almost more than merely metaphysical assault? Could he not obtain, with his own wealth, a replica of real silver, real gold, real diamond? And . . . yet . . . if that was not why he wanted the Pasqualine Ring . . . then why did he want the Pasqualine Ring?

As long as he lived, Eszterhazy was never to be entirely sure. But he was to become sure enough.

And still the assaults continued.

About ten A.M. and there was Colonel Count Cruttz. Unusual. For one thing; for another, what was it the older man was muttering to himself? It sounded like *Saint Vitus*. An invocation? Perhaps. Perhaps not. In Bella —

The Hospice of Saint Vitus in Bella at the time of its founding had been just that — a hospice for pilgrims seeking cure for what might have been (in modern terms) chorea, cerebral palsy, ergot poisoning, certain sorts of lunacy, or . . . many things indeed. By and by most people had learned not to bake bread from mouldy rye, and the rushing torrents of the pilgrimages had slowed to trickles; still, the prolongedly lunatic had to be lodged somewhere, it being no longer fashionable to lose them in the forest or lock them in a closet: and so, by the time of King Ignats Salvador (the Empire did not yet exist), the Hospice had become the Madhouse and St. Vitus's Shrine its chapel. It was quite true that besides the common enclosures there was a secluded cloister for insane nuns and, far on the other side, one for mad monks and priests; it was *not* true, common reports notwithstanding, that there was also one for barmy bishops.

"Good mid-morning to you, Colonel Count Cruttz; very well, then: *Fritsli*."

"Mi' morning, Engli. Say, you are a gaffer at St. Vitus, ain't you?"

"I am one of the Board of Governors, yes."

"Well, I want a ticket. Morits. One of my footmen." The colonel-count

looked haggard.

Dr. Eszterhazy reached out from a pigeon-hole a dreaded "yellow ticket," a **Form For Examination Prior to Commitment**; sighed. "Poor Morits. Well, this should get him seen to, promptly;" he signed it large. And, did he not, "poor Morits" indeed might gibber and howl for hours in the public corridors, waiting his turn on standby. "What has happened to him? Morits, mmm. *Pale chap*, isn't he?"

Master confirmed that man was indeed a pale chap. That was him. What had *happened*? Man had gone mad, was what happened. In the night, not long before dawn. Screams had rocked the house — and it was an old house with thick walls, too. Insane with terror, Morits. "Mostly he just screamed and tried to hide himself in his own armpits, but when you could make out what he was saying while screaming, why, it was always the same thing. Always the same thing. Always." Cruttz turned his haggard gaze on Eszterhazy.

Who asked, "And what was that? This . . . 'the same thing' . . . ?"

Cruttz wet his lips. Repeated, " 'On the ceiling! On the ceiling! The witch-man! On the ceiling!' "

"The . . . 'witch-man'? Who and what was that?"

Heavily: "That is who and what and which the people call this Hellhound, Melanchthon Mudge."

Silence. Then, "Very well, then. One understands 'the witch-man.' But. What and what does he mean by 'on the ceiling'?"

A shrug. "I am damned if I know. And I feel that just by knowing the fiend I might be damned. And so poor Morits has been screaming, struggling, be-pissing himself for hours now, and brandy hasn't helped and neither has holy water nor holy oil and so I've come for the yellow ticket. See?"

Eszterhazy saw only scantily. "Had the man . . . Morits . . . ever before showed signs of —?"

Reluctantly: "Well. . . yes . . . sort of. Nervous type of chap, always was. Which is all that keeps me from shooting down that swine like a mad dog with my revolver-pistol." That, and — the Emperor having indicated a keen dislike for having people shot down like mad dogs with revolver-pistols — that and the likelihood of such an action's being surely followed by a ten-year exile to the remote wilderness of Little Byzantia, where the company of the lynx, the bear, and the wild boar might not suffice for the loss of more cosmopolitan company.

Colonel Count Cruttz took up the "yellow ticket"; and as he was doing so and murmuring some words of thanks and of farewell, his eyes met Eszterhazy's. The latter felt certain that the same thought was in both their minds: was Mudge punishing the house in which he had been humiliated? Was Mudge doing this? Was Mudge not doing this?

And, if so, what might Mudge not do next?

\* \* \*

One was soon enough to learn.

Quite late that morning as he was being examined in St. Vitus by the Admitting Physician, pale Morits not only ceased struggling, but — upon being instructed to do so — had stood up. Quietly Dr. Smitts applied the stethoscope. And Morits, pale Morits, gave a great scream, blood gushed from his nose and mouth, and — “I caught him in my arms. The stethoscope was pulled from my ears as he fell, but I had heard enough,” said Dr. Smitts.

“What did you hear?”

“I heard his heart leap. And then I heard it stop. Oh, of course, I did what I could for him. But it never started again. No. Never.”

“Never. . . .”

Was this what Mudge had done next?

Eszterhazy thought it was.

Later, some years later, Eszterhazy was to acquire as his personal body-servant the famous Herrekk, a Mountain Tsigane, who stayed on with him . . . and on and on. . . . But that was later. This year the office was being filled (if *filled* was not too strong a verb) by one Turt, who had qualified by some years as a barber; and if experience folding towels well enough had not made Turt exquisite in the folding and unfolding of and other cares pertaining to Eszterhazy's clothes . . . well . . . one could not have everything. Could one? Turt awoke him; Turt brought, first, the hot coffee, and next the hot water and the scented shaving-soap. Next Turt would bring the loose-fitting breakfast-gown and on a tray the breakfast, which — perhaps fortunately — Turt did not himself cook. Turt meant to do well, Turt clearly meant to do better than he did, and it was not Turt's fault that he breathed so very heavily. Turt (short for Turtuscou) was a Romanou, and it was a fact of social life in the Triune Monarchy that sooner or later one's Romanou employee would vanish away on what the English called “French leave”: and return . . . by and by . . . with some fearsome story of dreadful death and incapacitating illness amongst far-away family; if/when this ever happened, Eszterhazy had determined to terminate Turt's service. But Turt, though not bothersomely bright, was bright enough, and either saw to it that all his near of kin stayed in good health or else he simply allowed them to die without benefit of his attendance in whatever East Latin squalor pertained to them around the mouth of the Ister.

On this morning Eszterhazy, dimly aware of great pain, was more acutely aware of Turt's breathing more heavily than usual. Had Turt gasped? Had Turt cried out? If so, *why*? Eszterhazy sat bolt up in bed. “*Dominu, Dominu!*” exclaimed Turt.

“What? What?” — heavily, anguished.

For reply Turt pointed to the floor. What was on the floor? Turt's *Lord* looked.

Blood on the floor.

Instantly the pain flared up. Instantly, Eszterhazy remembered. He had been sleeping soundly and calmly enough when something obliged him to wake up. Some dim light suffused the room. Some ungainly shape was present, visible, in the room. Something long, attenuated, overhead. Something overhead. Something barely below the ceiling. Something which turned over as a swimmer turns over in water. Something with a human face. The face of Mr. Mudge, the medium. How it glared at him, with what hate it glared down at him. Its lips writhed up, and, *The ring!* it said. *The ring, the ring! I must have the ring!* It made a swooping, scooping gesture with one long, long, incredibly long lengthened arm. That was the first pain. What was it which the hand now held and showed to him? It was a heart which it held and showed to him; a human heart. And, whilst the words echoed, echoed, *Ring! Ring!* the fingers tightened and the fingers squeezed and that was the second pain. The third. The —

It had been a dream, a bad, bad, dream; a nightmare dream. Only that, and nothing more. In that case, why this dreadful pain upon his heart? And why the blood upon the —

"A nosebleed," he heard himself say. And heard Turt say, "No, sir. No. Not."

"Why not?"

Turt began making many gestures, the burden of them being that, for one thing, there was no blood upon his master's nose and none upon his master's sheets. That, futhermore, blood dropping from the side of the bed to the floor would have left a stain of a certain size, only. And that this stain was of a larger and a wider size. Which meant that it had fallen from a greater height. And as Turt's hand went up and pointed to the ceiling, the hand and all the rest of Turt's body trembled; the Romanou are of all the races of the Empire of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania the most superstitious by far, and their legends teem and pullulate with accounts of *uampyri* and werewolves and werebears and werebats and werecats; and of ghoulies and ghosties and things which do far worse in the night than merely go *boomp*.

— then why this fearsome pain? Eszterhazy started to sit up, cried out, gestured towards the cabinet, gasped, "The small blue bottle —" The elixir of foxglove made him feel better, then (Turt supplying this next bottle unbid) the spirits of wine made him feel better yet. Then he gestured to the still red stain, directed, "Clean it up."

Turt, so often metaphorical and metaphysical, chose now to be literal. And simply sopped a corner of the napkin in the still-steaming coffee, stooped, wipe, wipe: 'twas done. He made the dirtied cloth vanish. Straightened up. Smoothed his sallow face. "My *Domini*'s coffee," he said. Soon afterward he brought the shaving-water and the scented soap. Eszterhazy had for a while little to do and much to think about (there was not, considering his beard, much to shave, either: the neck and the cheekbones; but Turt



trimmed also).

Eszterhazy, while his servant scraped and clipped, considered his own peril. Presumably, Mudge was anyway somewhat in fear of him, whereas he had been in no way afraid of poor Morits. Presumably, he himself was therefore . . . safe? Well . . . safer. . . .

***But for how long?***

He recalled that face, high up, hateful. To prove the cheat of the servers of the Idol of Bel at Babylon, Daniel had scattered ashes on the floor; would it now be necessary to scatter them on the ceiling?

Eszterhazy was in bed. Bed. Boat. Boat. As he drifted by in the darkness he heard the sound of the district watchman rapping the butt of his staff on the flagstone pave at the corner. Presently he would hear it rapping on the other corner. He did not. He was not there. He was somewhere else. He knew and did not know where. It was in a great yard somewhere, an open waste of rubble and huts. The South Ward, somewhere. Behind a mouldering tenement. Between it and a riven old wall. Up there in that room, that room *there*, with the broken shutter banging aslant, lived an old man and an old woman, there, there in the night. Here, down *here*, concealed in a half-sunken pit, someone was hiding and biding time. Someone tall and sleek and grim. Someone muffled in a cloak. Was waiting. The cracked old bell began to toll in the tower of the Madhouse of Saint Vitus. Someone chuckled. It was not a nice sound. At once Eszterhazy knew who it was. *I am the brother of the shadow of the slain, the vanguard of the shadow of the living. I am the medium, Mr. Mudge. As well.*

Mr. Mudge moved up out of the half-dug pit, and who knew for what gross usage the pit was to have been dugged; moved forward, ahead, face intent. Nearer to the tottery old tenement, nearer to the window behind the broken slant shutter, Eszterhazy desperate to stop him, but paralyzed, unable to call out, to move. To *breathe*. Shutter suddenly springing open. Clap. Bang. Cough. Someone springing out and down. Someone? Something? Dark, dark, very dark. Fluid movement, there in the dark. Warn Mr. Mudge? *Why?* No. Mr. Mudge not there. *Where?* His cloak flying, floating, in the blackness night; Mr. Mudge fleeing before it as though, paws on its shoulders, it coursed him through the night. No: Something else coursed him through the blackness night. Scorn and contempt on his face giving

way to concentration, concentration to effort, effort to — *Run, Mudge, run!* — to concern, to care, to alarm, faster, *faster, faster*, leap and run and climb and clamber and jump and clamber and climb and run and leap; close behind him something followed faster yet and something else for a second flashed and glinted, something else gleamed at or about the neck of . . . something . . . as sometimes one sees a glint or gleam where the fond master of an animal has fastened a metal sigil advising of its name and owner; or like some ring on a hand moving suddenly in the dim and flaring lamps —

— screamed, Mr. Mudge; **Quaere:** What did Mr. Mudge scream? **Responsum:** Mr. Mudge screamed for help. **Q.:** How did Mr. Mudge scream for help and to what or whom? **R.:** To "*Belphegor, Belzebub, Baphomet, Sathanas, à mon aide O mes princes, aidez-moi, à moi, à moi, à moi, à —*" The prayer, if prayer it was, decayed into a continuous repetition of the broad a-sound as Mr. Mudge fled, leaping; as . . . something . . . leaping, coughing, followed after him; a great, sudden, abrupt coughing sound, a great forelimb chopping down Mr. Mudge: and all his imprecations sank powerlessly beneath even the level of derision. . . .

Eszterhazy, body spent with having followed the hazards of the chase, awoke bathed in sweat and in bed.

One thing alone remained still quick within his ears, and though it seemed not to be from this night before, yet perhaps it somehow was. *That she-cat has claws*, an odd voice said.

*That she-cat has claws.*

Dawn.

Mrash.

"Your Lordship, that tiger come a-wandering again-time!"

Eszterhazy lifted dulled, fatigued eyes. "The — ? Ah . . . the leopard? You saw it running along and up the roofs?" What was it he felt, now? It was unbalanced that he felt now. He had with infinite difficulties maintained a stance against attack, assault, terror, pain, and worse. He felt this was gone now. But he was infinitely tired now. *Infinitely* tired. He dared be infinitely careful, lest he fall, now. What had and what was happening?

Mrash said, "No, lordship. I seen it running *down* the roofs. And as I looked, so I seen. 'Seen what'? Why, seen summat as was not the tiger nor the leopard. Look out the window there, me lordship. Look out, look up. Look up."

Where was bluff old Colonel Brennshekk, who had hunted leopard in Africa, thinking them more dangerous than lion or tiger which course the level ground alone? Back in Africa, out of which, always something new. So Plautus says. Pliny?

Marsh again gestured to the window. "My lordship, look," he said. Added, "There cross the alley, on the roof of old Baron Johan house. On the ridge o' the roof, by the chimbley; look, sir."

Eszterhazy looked; shielding with his hand against the obscuring reflection of the gaslight on the window glass, straining his eyes, wishing — not for the first time — that someone would invent a *light*, a quite bright light, which could (unlike the theatrical limelight) be cast *up* or *across*, across a distance. Well. Meanwhile. Meanwhile, something flapped in the wind, there on the rooftop, on the ridge by the chimney. "What, Mrashko? Some old clothes? Carried by wind — eh?"

"Nay, my lordship," Mrash said. "Clothes, yes. Old or new. But I doubt the wind be that strong tonight to — No matter. That be a cloak and a full suit of clothes, sir, and I be a veteran of more nor one war and I'll tell thee what, Master: inside the suit of clothes does a dead man lie."

Mrash was hired to perform only the duties of a man-cook, but Mrash was no fool, he had indeed been in more than one war, nor had he spent all that time cloistered in the cook-tent; nor had his eyes been worn by much reading. His master said, "Sound the alarm." In a moment the great iron ring rang out its clamor of *ngoyng ngoyng mramha mram, ngoyng ngoyng mramha mram*. In the very faint glim of the single small gaslamp at the alley's far end men could be seen running, casting odd and oddly-moving shadows. But what was on the rooftop cast no shadow. And it never moved at all.

By and by they came with the hooks and the ladders and the bull's-eye lanterns and the grapples and the torches. They climbed up from inside the great old house across the alley and then they climbed up the steep-pitched roof. And Eszterhazy climbed with them. (Had he made this climb before? He *had* . . . *hadn't* he?)

"Aye, he be dead. And have *been*. He'm *stiff*." This from a volunteer fireman, a coal-porter by his sooty look. "See how wry his neck? He did fell and bruck it." And:

"Am these *claw*-marks?" asked another. Answering himself, "Nay, not here in The Town," meaning Bella. "I expects he somehow tore himself when he fall . . . for fall to his dread death 'tis clear he did, may the Resurrected Jesus Christ and all the Saints have mercy on him and us. Aye. Man did fell. . . ."

Dread death. . . . Mercy. . . .

The very-slightly-odd lordship who lived in the smaller and lower house which faced Turkling Street the other side of the alley, he shook his head. "If so, how came he here?" was his question, almost as though asking of himself. "Here — high above the street on the peak of a house with no higher one to fall from? Dead men fall *down*. They don't fall *up*."

It was so. There being no more to say to that, they brought the dead man down.

Old Helen, Baroness Johan's old housekeeper-cook, served them the traditional hot rum-and-water. While they were sipping it: "Sir Doctor. Pardon, sir. The police want to know who 'tis. The late deceased. Can Sir

Doctor — living 'cross the lane — tell them who 'twas and what was doing there?"

Sir Doctor started to nod. Stopped. What indeed? Had it all been a dream which he had earlier seen as he lay upon his bed? Or "a vision of the night?" Or — His mouth moved silently; then, "The deceased called himself 'Melanchthon Mudge,' " he said. He took another swallow of the grog. It was very strong.

Just as well.

Just as well? Aye, well, add it up. That there were rings which were rings of power was a mere commonplace in the lore of legend. And what Dr. Eszterhazy knew about the lore of legend was more, even, than he knew about anything in which he had ever been granted a degree — though who would grant him a degree in it? The thumb-ring of Duke Pasquale (*which* Duke Pasquale? did it even matter?) was a very late entry into the lore of legend, and had come to Eszterhazy's attention only yesterday, as it were. How had Melanchthon Mudge learned of it? — whoever "Melanchthon Mudge" really was? hunted down as though by a leopard and killed as though by a leopard and left high up aloft as though by a leopard. *What* had he done for the third Napoleon of France and the second Alexander of Russia and the first and last Amadeus of Spain, all men of subsequent ill-fate, that they should have given him (doubtless at his request) portions of the time-scattered Pasqualine jewels? Nothing *very* good, one might be sure. (Was it all adding up? Well, one would see. Get on with it. Go on. Go on.)

Was the power of Duke Pasquale's ring that it gave one a capacity to turn for a while into an animal, a beast, a wild beast? Well could one imagine the glee of roaming wild and free of human form — Well. And once again he marvelled at what must have been the long, *long* restraint (if this were all true) of the self-imagined Royal couple in never having made use of the Pasqualine ring. Never? "Never" was a longer word than its own two syllables; *never*? Surely neither of them, old King, old Queen, would ever (never) have used it for mere glee or mere power. Only an inescapable need for defense, for self-defense, the defense of Eszterhazy and the house of Count Cruttz and perhaps of that whole great city of Bella (. . . *a leopard shall watch over thy cities* . . .) against the great evil thing, the vengeful and killing thing which called itself Melanchthon Mudge, could have impelled them to make use of it. *If* this were all true: *could* this be all true? all of it? any of it? — for, if it was not, what was the other explanation? If there was another explanation.

Try as he might, as he added all this up, Eszterhazy could think of no other explanation.

A dozen frontiers were being "rectified." A dozen boundaries were changing shape, none of them large enough to show upon a single map in an atlas;





but, as to matters of straightening here and bending there, here a square mile and there some several kilometres: a dozen frontiers and boundaries were changing shape. And for every *quid a quo*, with dust being blown off a thousand parchment charters. In order to assure that a certain area in the Niçois Savoy be restored to its natural outlines, it was necessary to compensate . . . to, well, compensate two municipalities, one diocese, and . . . and what was *this*? to compensate *the heirs of the fourth marriage-bed of the august Duke Pasquale III*, in lieu of dower-rights, rights of conquest, rights of man, rights of women . . . *rights*.

What cared the historians and the cartographers? and for that matter, what cared the minor statesmen around this particular "green table," for the right or plight of *the heirs of the fourth marriage-bed* etc? Nothing. Save that if it were not taken care of, then neither could other boundaries and rights be taken care of, and a certain sand-bar in the Gambia would remain out of bounds and no-man's-land, to vex the palm-oil and peanut-oil trade of certain citizens of certain Powers.

"So, you see, Doctor," said Stowtfuss of the Foreign Office of the Triune Monarchy, "you were quite right in your suggestion and we passed it on and *they* passed it on; and, now, well, the King of the Single Sicily is still not really King of the Single Sicily and never will be . . . a good thing for Sicily, and a better thing for him. But now at least he can pretend his pretensions at a healthily higher standard of living. A tidy little income, that, from the old estate in the Nice-Savoy."

Eszterhazy nodded. "And his wife needn't scrub the floor on her aged knees," he said. Old woman, old wife, old she-cat with claws. And with that one ring of power which wanton Mr. Mudge had so terribly wanted. That he, too, might have claws? And, turning, changing his spots — and more than alone his spots — use such claws in the night?

"Yes, yes," said Stowtfuss, pityingly. "Yes, poor chaps, the poor old things. He and his old wife are cousins, you know. They are also related to . . . what's the name? her maiden name? . . . a relation to the poet, same as the old man's mother's maiden name, to the poet Count Giacomo — ah yes! Leopardi! Leopardi! Count Giacomo Leopardi was their cousin. I suppose you may guess the animal in that coat of arms."

# The Observatory

by George H. Scithers & Darrell Schweitzer

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There's more bad news from the unforgiving Universe that we all live in: ideas are terribly, terribly cheap.

The problem is — partly — that everybody has ideas, whether they recognize them as such or not. In writing science fiction, the *idea* is the easy part; the work comes in making a story out of it.

The same is true with science. There is an idea, whether reached by wild guessing or by methodical deduction from the evidence. The real work comes in arranging the evidence, devising tests of the idea against existing theories, and then convincing one's colleagues that the idea is more useful, more elegant, or more true than what they've been using up till then.

Consider the moons of Mars: Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) suggested that there were two. In 1877, Asaph Hall used telescopes that weren't available in Kepler's time and discovered that, yes, Mars has two moons. Kepler, properly, gets no credit for the prediction: he did no real work to prove his idea, and his reasoning (Venus has no moons; Earth, one; Jupiter, four; therefore, Mars should have . . .) is silly. His prediction, then, is no more than a guess.

Pseudo-scientists make lots of guesses; so many that some may even be right. Ignatius Donnelly and Immanuel Velikovsky both suggested that the Earth had catastrophic encounters with comets in the distant past. Both, however, neglected to do any real work on their ideas; neither bothered to learn enough astronomy or physics to make their ideas sound even superficially plausible.

The scientific literature is currently discussing a theory, put forth by Alvarez, Alvarez (father & son), Muller, and others, that the disappearance of the dinosaurs — and possibly even the tendency of extinctions to happen in bursts every 26 million years or so — was caused by a catastrophic encounter with a comet. But the Alvarazes, Muller, *et alii* have done their work first, reasoning from fossil statistics and traces of the rare metal iridium that appear to mark the end of the Cretaceous.

Does all this "prove" that Donnelly and Velikovsky are suppressed prophets of unpopular scientific truths? No; they're more the equivalent of a battery of monkeys sitting at typewriters, trying to write Shakespeare, and they finally got the first line of *Hamlet* half-done. ✂

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